

Unlocking Success: Key Factors for International Mobility Program in Implementing the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka Curriculum

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Abstract

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This article is based on research conducted at nationally accredited State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Indonesia, which have already begun implementing the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum. The informants serving as data sources consist of 15 students participating in the International Mobility Program (IMP). A qualitative case study gathered data from interviews, observations, and documentation. The research emphasizes that the determinants of IMP success in supporting the implementation of the MBKM curriculum consist of four aspects: 1) through the ability to adapt well to a new environment, students gain learning experiences outside the campus by adjusting and respecting cultural differences in the destination country; 2) through international language proficiency, students are increasingly trained to conduct high-quality research and communicate effectively creatively; 3) through their interest in challenges and adventures in foreign campuses, students confidently present in international forums; 4) through the transformation of a global perspective, students are motivated to pursue further studies abroad and intend to participate in international programs in the following years. Understanding and emphasizing these factors is crucial for optimizing the benefits derived from international mobility initiatives within the unique context of religious higher education institutions.

Kata kunci:

Critical Success Factors, International Mobility Program, Merdeka Curriculum

Abstrak.

Artikel ini didasarkan pada penelitian di PTKIN Indonesia yang terakreditasi unggul di tingkat nasional yang sudah memulai menerapkan kurikulum Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). Informan yang menjadi sumber data terdiri dari 15 mahasiswa yang ikut dalam International Mobility Program (IMP). Melalui penelitian kualitatif studi kasus, data diperoleh dari hasil wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi. Penelitian ini menegaskan bahwa penentu kesuksesan IMP yang mendukung penerapan kurikulum MBKM yaitu terdiri dari empat aspek 1) melalui kemampuan beradaptasi yang baik dengan lingkungan baru, mahasiswa mendapatkan pengalaman belajar di luar kampus dengan menyesuaikan dan menghormati perbedaan budaya di negara tujuan, 2) melalui kemahiran bahasa internasional, semakin melatih mahasiswa untuk kreatif membuat riset yang berkualitas dan menyampaikan dengan komunikasi yang baik, 3) melalui ketertarikannya pada tantangan dan petualangan di kampus luar negeri, mahasiswa berani tampil presentasi dengan percaya diri di forum internasional, 4) melalui transformasi sudut pandang global, mahasiswa memiliki motivasi untuk melanjutkan studi di luar negeri dan berniat untuk mengikuti program internasional di tahun berikutnya. Pemahaman dan penekanan faktor-faktor ini penting untuk mengoptimalkan manfaat yang diperoleh dari mobilitas internasional dalam konteks pendidikan tinggi keagamaan.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of the International Mobility Program (IMP) in higher education institutions often receives cynical responses. Many question the significant benefits for the development of universities (Kuzhabekova et al., 2022). However, the program involves considerable financial expenditures from the country. Some also believe that the program is only utilized by some individuals for casual trips abroad without achieving maximal collaborative outcomes. Work visits to the targeted institutions may give the impression of formal visits merely to fulfill the requirements of travel reports for official purposes. Beyond that, there seems to be a lack of follow-up processes within the specified timeframe. This research is based on four important reasons. Firstly, despite its controversies, the international mobility program is crucial. The rapid developments in the world demand that students, who are future educators, entrepreneurs, consultants, and diplomats, must be capable of adapting and thinking globally. IMP also focuses on placing students' research internationally and its impact on learning practices and student experiences (Standley, 2015). All of these can be achieved if they have lecturers who adopt an international teaching approach and are familiar with the global context (Commints et al., 2010).

The second reason is the recent global discussion surrounding international mobility and Critical Success Factors (CSF), making them relatively new and highly debated topics. This program represents a novel concept. Policymakers and educators have recognized that internationalization and globalization can be promoted not only through sending students abroad for exchanges and advanced studies but beyond that (Tsai Shu-Min et al., 2020). The pinnacle of international mobility is an educational process. This program serves as an accumulation of knowledge construction, instilling attitudes, and participatory experiences to engage with communities and unique aspects of the world (Prasetyaningrum et al., 2022). Furthermore, the historical spectrum of international mobility has evolved. Presently, future international mobility encompasses survival and life, competition and collaboration, responses and foresight, individual and collective actions, understanding care and responsibility, international understanding, and national identity (Lin, 2016).

The third reason is the limited scope of research on the interconnection between CSF, IMP, and MBKM curricula. CSF encompasses various elements crucial for ensuring success (Boynton & Zmud, 1984; Rizkiana et al., 2021), applicable across both public and private sectors and not limited to specific project types. Defining CSF in program implementation is vital for improving success rates, reducing costs, and avoiding disappointment through continuous improvement efforts (Fryer et al., 2007; Tuan, 2020). For instance, Mahmood et al. (2014) examined determinants of success factors in research projects at Pakistani universities, identifying eleven factors including project security, team relationships, and transparency. Another study analyzed critical success factors in implementing regional development planning systems in Yogyakarta Special Region (Jogjaplan), highlighting aspects like leadership commitment, human resources, regulations, institutions, and infrastructure (Riana, 2020).

The fourth reason is that the Indonesian government itself, through the Ministry of Education, has formulated the 'Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka' (MBKM) curriculum. This independent campus curriculum aims to equip students with three competencies, literacy (Adhikara et al., 2022), skills, and character qualities to face the dynamic changes in the world (Meke et al., 2022). One of its manifestations is providing students with opportunities outside the campus to hone their abilities based on talents and interests through direct exposure to the working world as preparation for future careers (Lase, 2019; Loisa et al., 2022). The implementation of the

learning process in MBKM is also organized autonomously and flexibly in higher education institutions by providing an innovative and independent learning culture (Hasim, 2020). Thus, the needs and learning rights of students can be met based on a life-based, capability-based, and transdisciplinary approach. In a broader sense, this curriculum is projected to guide students to become competitive and well-rounded graduates, providing broad insights and valuable experiences in line with the graduate profile that meets the needs of the 21st century and the era of Industry 4.0 (Alawi et al., 2022; Vhalery et al., 2022). One of the eight learning processes in the independent campus is student exchange (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021; Kemendikbud & Tohir, 2020; Lase, 2019; Sudaryanto et al., 2020; Suryaman, 2020; Susetyo, 2020). Students are allowed to learn across campuses (both domestic and foreign) to develop their knowledge to bridge educational disparities and enhance diversity awareness, as well as build cross-regional, ethnic, cultural, and religious brotherhood even across countries, thus fostering a sense of brotherhood and love for the homeland (Anggraini et al., 2022).

The Ministry of Religious Affairs, through the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education (PTKI) of the Directorate General of Islamic Education, conducted cross-campus learning by inviting a number of Student Organization Leaders (ORMAWA) to three countries, namely Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand, from November 24-30, 2019. The Student Mobility Program involved 68 Ormawa leaders, 36 Heads of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) throughout Indonesia, and 13 faculty members and educational staff. In addition, based on an interview with the International Office (IO) officials at the Faculty of Education UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, it was obtained that the International Mobility Program (IMP) was first implemented on September 13-18, 2022, in the three countries (Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand). The event was attended by 80 participants from students and faculty members. Travel and accommodation expenses were covered by each participant, coordinated by the Faculty's IO. The next IMP agenda will be implemented by each program at the master's and undergraduate levels through field study events, not only held incidentally but has become a routine annual event. The funding source used is students' self-funded and supported by program and faculty funding in the field of student affairs. The participants' enthusiasm can be seen from the increasing number of student registrations to participate in the IMP in the following year. With the increasing level of participation, there is the potential to gain numerous academic benefits, including increased access, diversity in program offerings, development of cross-cultural skills, collaborative research, curriculum and pedagogy innovation, capacity building, as well as economic, socio-cultural, and political benefits (Knight & Liu, 2019).

Therefore, considering the urgency of IMP, through this research, the researcher examines the critical success factors of IMP in implementing MBKM in State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) in Indonesia. This research is conducted at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, which has implemented IMP oriented towards MBKM implementation. The focus of the study is on how IMP becomes a determining factor for success in implementing MBKM in PTKIN Indonesia? What are the critical success factors of IMP in the implementation of MBKM in PTKIN Indonesia? IMP is one of the important policies focused on by governments worldwide. Therefore, it is recommended that the government and universities continue to organize various related plans to enhance the global mobility of students, so that students who have not been abroad have the opportunity to practice and improve their international mobility (Tsai Shu-Min, Wang Yaw-Yih, Lee Yuan-Duen, & Hong Song-Tsan, 2020).

RESEARCH METHOD

The use of a case study approach in this qualitative research aims to provide an intensive description of the situation and conditions in the context of real life. This approach is the most appropriate for exploring interesting phenomena with a high level of complexity that requires abundant data sources to gain an in-depth understanding (Creswell, 2009; Townsend et al., 2015; Yin, 2003). Qualitative methods are also positioned as a valuable tool for theory-building and integrating contextual variables, proving crucial for international studies (Doz, 2011; Kreiner et al., 2006). As in this study, the focus is on revealing why IMP is a factor in the success of implementing MBKM and exploring the success factors in the implementation of IMP for MBKM applications.

The informants were selected through purposive sampling, meaning individuals deemed capable of answering the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 1994) due to their experience and understanding of the studied case's context. The determining factor in qualitative sample selection is data saturation, where the analysis reaches a point where no new meaning emerges (Smith, 2015). In other words, the number of interviews across cases is not crucial as long as saturation is achieved.

This study involved 15 informants from PTKIN that implement IMP, specifically UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. Informants were confirmed to be students and staff from the international office of faculties and universities who understand and have experience/followed IMP as part of the MBKM implementation efforts in PTKIN. Interviews focused on four core questions related to adaptability to the environment, international language skills, challenges and adventures, and global perspectives. Procedurally, before conducting interviews, the researcher briefly explained the purpose and objectives of the research (Townsend et al., 2015). Interview data were supported by collecting data from archives and documentation. This data was obtained from the university's official website, publications, and official university documents such as strategic planning documents and their implementation.

Furthermore, in the data analysis technique, during qualitative data collection, researchers gather text or words through interviews with informants or by writing field notes during observations. This necessitates the need to convert these words into a computer document for analysis. Alternatively, researchers also listen to recordings or read field notes to initiate the analysis process, which is then followed by transcribing all interviews and all observational notes to fulfill the completeness of the procedure (Creswell, 2012). This study uses Yin's (2003) conceptual framework, where data analysis involves examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or combining evidence to draw conclusions based on empirical data. Through this process, the researcher can minimize the possibility of bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), thereby strengthening the internal validity of the findings (Townsend et al., 2015).

In the process of validating the data, the researcher used member checking. This was done to obtain valid and accurate data. Valid research data are those that have received agreement from the data provider. Therefore, the researcher needs to check the interpretation results to ensure that the reality and meaning written are valid. If the results are not in line and there are significant differences, the researcher must reevaluate and adjust based on what the informant conveyed (Sugiyono, 2008).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation indicate that the IMP is a key determinant of the success of implementing the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum in Islamic State Universities (PTKIN) in Indonesia. The success factors of IMP in MBKM implementation are evidenced by students' adaptability to a conducive environment, proficiency in international languages, interest in challenges and adventures beyond the campus/abroad, and a transformation of global perspectives.

Adaptability of Students to a Conducive Environment

The ability of students to adapt to their environment is recognized during the preparation phase. According to interviews with IT,

The IMP activities require mental, physical, material, and financial preparations. Mental preparation involves gearing up for diverse cultures abroad, including researching and understanding the culture of the destination country, getting acquainted with local customs, and adhering to applicable rules and regulations.

During the implementation, YFA emphasizes being friendly to the local population and strengthening English language skills for effective interaction. TR highlights that *this approach allows students to follow the lifestyle abroad, adapt to halal food, understand currency, and cope with time differences*. The proverb used as a principle, AWA, signifies the importance of understanding local culture for effective adaptation to foreign campus environments. SIA emphasizes, the need for physical preparation to maintain fitness and carry necessary personal medications, considering the limited time spent in various locations with different climates. Material preparation, according to ESS, involves presenting materials and practicing communication intensively with supervising faculty members.

International-level presentations demand fluent communication skills, both in foreign languages and subject matter expertise. Presentation performance is encouraged to be engaging and interactive, avoiding reading texts and focusing on the development and explanation of each point on PowerPoint slides.

Other crucial material aspects include necessary documents for foreign travel, such as identification cards and passports, ensuring they are in good condition, as well as immigration authorization applications for entry into a country. One case involved a torn passport, causing hindrance at the airport and leading to the denial of further travel.

Mastery of International Language Skills

International academic journeys necessitate proficiency in foreign language skills, especially English, with a primary emphasis on speaking skills. According to MNI, mastery of English is crucial as international communication primarily occurs in English. ARS highlights that the majority of academic visits use English for communication, especially in the form of presenting research paper results.

Writing and presenting scientific work are recommended to be in English, and the question-and-answer sessions should be answered directly, contextually, or impromptu in English.

TR suggests that, besides preparing excellent presentation materials, students need to prepare for effective communication skills in English.

Fluent communication skills form the foundation for expanding relationships and leveraging the experiences gained.

Students strive to enhance English communication skills through various methods, such as using the Duolingo app (TR), watching English news content on YouTube (ZZ), and utilizing Google Translate for pronunciation practice (AR). YCP practices English by engaging in intensive listening and speaking exercises with friends or family.

Interest in Challenges and Adventures Beyond the Campus/Abroad

Students acknowledge their interest in participating in the IMP due to the challenges and adventures of studying at foreign campuses. Based on observations, the enthusiasm of students in participating in the IMP is evident in their active involvement in every preparation briefing. They are willing to self-finance their participation in the program. According to RA,

contributing to international activities and sharing sessions with foreign universities is a unique challenge, making the IMP an extraordinary experience. Students' interest in overcoming challenges and exploring adventures at foreign campuses is pursued with determination. Challenges include public speaking and the preparation of papers, requiring students to bravely speak at international forums and present research papers systematically.

MNI states that participating in the IMP enables personal development in public speaking and creating papers worthy of presentation abroad. ZZ believes that the IMP is a moment to increase students' confidence, allowing them to competently present their ideas and scientific writings in English at other forums such as English-language conferences. YCP also states that the IMP is a valuable adventure for building relationships with peers from the same or different campuses, thereby opening up opportunities for cross-country research collaborations.

Transformation of Global Perspectives

Through the IMP, students develop new perspectives. According to TR, Indonesia is perceived to lag behind Singapore and Malaysia. Nevertheless, ZA gains numerous references about a "new atmosphere" not found in Indonesia.

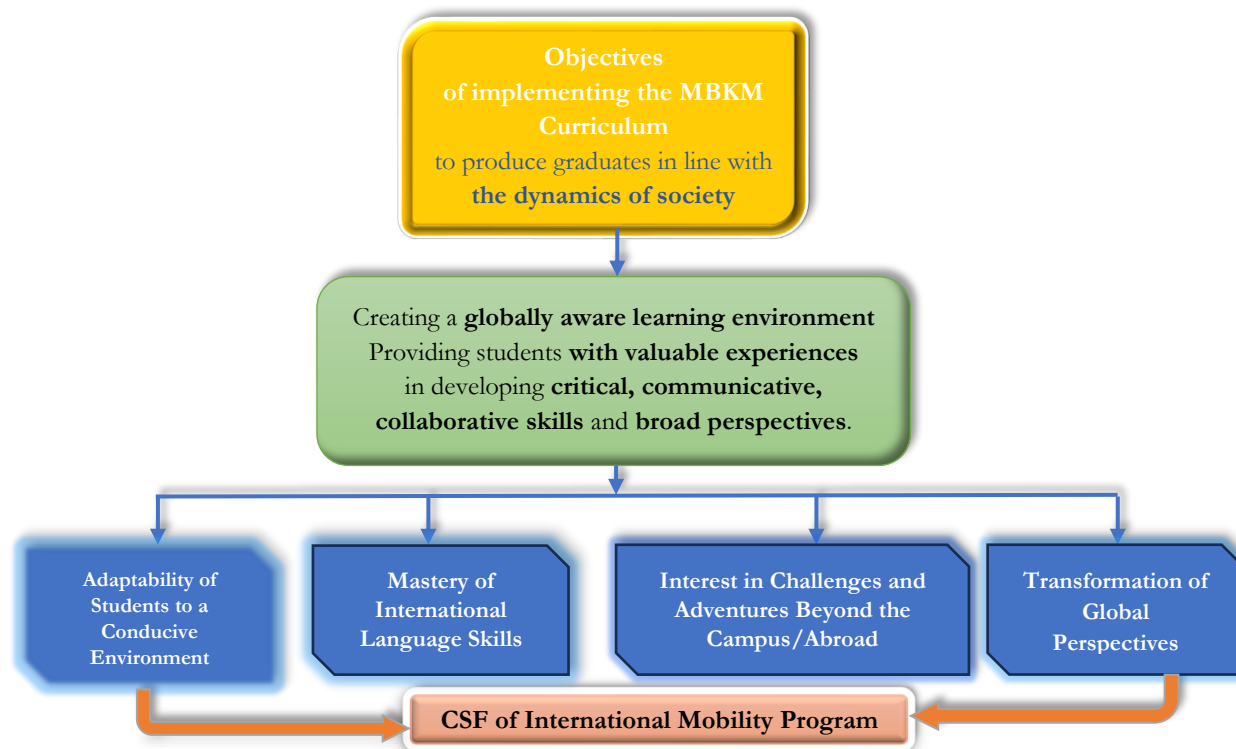
The countries I visited boast clean and well-organized cityscapes, towering luxurious skyscrapers, efficient transportation systems, and diverse language or communication styles.

Overall, students express interest and happiness during their visits abroad, appreciating the learning experiences beyond the campus. According to them, the learning environments are serene, lush, clean, organized, well-maintained, spacious, quiet, and enjoyable. People are described as humble without a sense of superiority, and there are numerous international students in classes. From the IMP experience, students become more enthusiastic and prepared to welcome subsequent IMPs and other programs in the following years. The impact also motivates students to pursue further studies abroad. Additionally, they become more enthusiastic about developing literacy and proficiency in English and public speaking. Furthermore, students are more trained in collaboration, negotiation, and critical thinking in academic meetings among universities.

Visually, CSF for IMP in Implementing the MBKM Curriculum can be explained in the following figure:

Figure 1

The Pattern of CSF for International Mobility Program in Implementing the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka Curriculum



DISCUSSION

The International Mobility Program (IMP) plays a strategic role in determining the success of implementing the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum in Islamic State Universities (PTKIN) in Indonesia (Yin, 2003). The implementation of learning in MBKM at the university aims to produce graduates in line with the progress of science and technology, the demands of the business and industry world, and the dynamics of society (Yamin & Syahrir, 2020; Sa'diyah et al., 2022). Research indicates that the success factors of IMP in MBKM include students' adaptability, mastery of international languages, interest in learning challenges beyond the campus, and a transformation of global perspectives (Nordin et al., 2020; Tsai Shu-Min et al., 2020).

In the implementation of IMP, students are recognized to possess significant adaptability skills to new environments. This involves mental preparation to face different cultures abroad (Bombita & Dicolen, 2020; Grantham, 2018), aligning with the principle of adaptation," reflecting students' earnestness in understanding and respecting local cultures. Students strive to prepare communication skills in English to adapt to international communication (Nordin et al., 2020).

The mastery of international languages, particularly English, becomes a primary focus in the IMP journey. Students emphasize the importance of mastering English to communicate effectively with international individuals, understand research presentations, and foster collaboration. Students employ various methods, such as using the Duolingo app and watching English news content on YouTube, to enhance their English communication skills, reflecting their dedication to improving foreign language communication abilities (Kasim et al., 2012; Nofia, 2020). This poses

a significant challenge for students in socializing on foreign campuses (Adimsyah, Fauzi, & Rofiq, 2023; Mumtahana, Ikmal, & Sari, 2022).

Challenges and adventures beyond the campus or abroad hold a unique appeal for students (Bombita & Dicolen, 2020; Knight & Liu, 2019). They are willing to self-finance their participation in this program, considering it an extraordinary experience. Through IMP, students can develop public speaking skills, produce high-quality papers (Bombita & Dicolen, 2020; Grantham, 2018), and boost confidence (Kasim et al., 2012), along with opportunities to build extensive networks. These impacts are also experienced by accompanying faculty members. The study programs can collaborate with global partners (Knight & Liu, 2019) (Arianto et al., 2024; Danuwara & Giyoto, 2024), meeting the criteria for internationally recognized study programs. The eight main programs to fulfill the right to learn outside the study program are student exchange, internships/work placements, teaching assistance in educational units, research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurial activities, independent studies/projects, and village development/thematic real work lectures (Loisa et al., 2022; Sa'diyah et al., 2022).

The internationalization of institutions is a transformative process in global perspective (Bombita & Dicolen, 2020). Through IMP, students gain new perspectives on country comparisons (Shen et al., 2022). They bring home experiences that involve not only academic aspects but also character aspects in understanding the habits, cultures, and communication styles of citizens in other countries. The positive impact of IMP is evident in students' enthusiasm to welcome similar programs in the future and the motivation to pursue further studies abroad (Nordin et al., 2020; Kodrat, 2021). In conclusion, this research provides an overview of IMP's success in supporting the principles of MBKM, not only creating a globally aware learning environment but also providing students with valuable experiences in developing critical, communicative, collaborative skills and broad perspectives, in line with the 6C principles (Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, Creative, Computational Thinking, and Compassion) in MBKM (Fatimah et al., 2022). The students also developed their soft skills by being more independent, confident and improve their problem-solving skills (Nordin et al., 2020) (Astra, Hafid, & Suban, 2024; Fitriani, Anam, & Maulana, 2024).

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the International Mobility Program (IMP) is a crucial determinant of success in applying the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) at Islamic State Universities (PTKIN). The four aspects gained by students in IMP strongly support the success of the MBKM program. The ability to adapt to new environments abroad has an impact on students' character or compassion, enabling them to understand and appreciate the culture in the destination country. Proficiency in international languages also boosts students' confidence in composing high-quality research, socializing, communicating, expressing opinions, and presenting scientific papers in international forums. The academic visits abroad are considered by students as challenges to venture beyond the campus and transform their global perspectives. Direct experiences in other countries cultivate motivation for further studies or participation in IMP programs in the following years. The more activities in international forums, the wider the opportunities for study programs and universities to collaborate with international partners.

This research is limited to one nationally accredited Islamic State University that has begun implementing MBKM. The results of this study cannot be generalized to other universities in Indonesia that already have world-class university status or have long implemented IMP. However,

at least, with IMP being conducted at universities newly implementing MBKM and aiming for world-class status, it can raise awareness and motivation to broaden global perspectives, encouraging more active participation in internationally acclaimed forums.

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