

## INVESTIGATING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MBKM IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING DEPARTMENT (A CASE STUDY AT IPB CIREBON)

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**Abstract:** The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, initiated by Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, seeks to enhance student autonomy, experiential learning, and curricular flexibility in higher education. This study explored the implementation of MBKM in the English Language Teaching Department at Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon, focusing on lecturers' and students' perceptions as well as challenges encountered during its implementation. Adopting a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with three lecturers and open-ended questionnaires administered to ten eighth-semester students in the English Language Education Department. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes. The findings indicate generally positive perceptions of MBKM, particularly in supporting practical learning experiences, professional skill development, and student engagement. Nevertheless, several challenges were identified, including institutional readiness and limited facilities. The study concludes that MBKM has the potential to improve English language teaching practices when supported by adequate institutional preparation and effective program management.

**Keywords:** Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka, MBKM implementation, English Language Teaching, qualitative research

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, initiated by Indonesia's Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2020, represents a major reform in higher education aimed at enhancing students' competencies through flexibility, interdisciplinarity, and experiential learning. The program allows students to study outside their major for up to three semesters, encouraging collaboration with industries, communities, and institutions (Kemendikbudristek, 2020). In the context of English Language Teaching (ELT), MBKM provides opportunities for students to apply linguistic and pedagogical knowledge beyond the classroom through activities such as internships, teaching assistance, research, and entrepreneurial projects (Supriati et al., 2022).

Previous studies have reported positive impacts of MBKM on students' soft and hard skills development (Handayani et al., 2022; Rahma et al., 2023). However, challenges in its implementation persist, particularly related to lecturers' understanding of the program, institutional readiness, and curriculum alignment (Werdiningsih et al., 2022). Moreover, empirical studies focusing on the implementation of MBKM in English education at the departmental level remain limited.

At Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon (IPB Cirebon), the English Language Teaching Department has adopted MBKM as part of its curriculum reform to prepare graduates who are adaptive and professionally competent. Nevertheless, lecturers and students have encountered several obstacles, including limited resources, unfamiliar procedures, and differing perceptions of program objectives. Therefore, this study aims to explore the implementation of MBKM in the English Language Teaching Department at IPB Cirebon by examining lecturers' and students' perceptions, identifying the benefits and challenges, and discussing its implications for English language teaching practices.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program within its real-life institutional context. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because the research focused on exploring participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of MBKM rather than measuring variables or testing hypotheses (Creswell, 2018). This design allowed the researcher to examine the phenomenon holistically and contextually within a specific educational setting. The study was conducted at the English Language Teaching

Department of Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon. This department was selected because it has formally adopted MBKM as part of its curriculum and has involved both lecturers and students in various MBKM-related activities.

### **RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS**

The participants of this study consisted of three lecturers and ten eighth-semester students from the English Language Education Department. The lecturers were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in MBKM implementation, particularly in curriculum development and teaching assistance activities. The student participants were also selected purposively, representing those who had participated in MBKM programs and had sufficient academic experience to reflect on the implementation of MBKM in the department. The selection of participants was intended to ensure that the data collected were relevant and information-rich in relation to the research focus.

### **DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES**

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the lecturers to explore their understanding of MBKM, their experiences during its implementation, and the challenges they encountered. This interview format allowed flexibility for participants to elaborate on their responses while maintaining alignment with the research objectives.

Open-ended questionnaires were administered to the students to capture their perspectives on the benefits, challenges, and overall impact of MBKM on their learning experiences. The use of open-ended questions enabled students to express their views freely and in their own words. In addition, observations were carried out during MBKM-related activities to provide contextual information and support the interpretation of participants' responses by capturing real-life practices related to the program.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. Interview recordings and questionnaire responses were transcribed and carefully read to gain an overall understanding of the data. The data were then coded to identify recurring patterns and meaningful units of information. These codes were grouped into broader themes related to MBKM implementation, perceived benefits, challenges, and implications for English language

teaching practices. Observational notes were used to enrich the analysis by providing contextual descriptions that supported the emerging themes.

## SCOPE AND CONTEXTUAL LIMITATION

This study involved a relatively small number of participants, namely three lecturers and ten eighth-semester students from a single department. As a result, the data represent the specific experiences and perceptions of participants within the English Language Teaching Department at Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon. The limited number of participants may affect the breadth of perspectives captured in the study. However, in line with the nature of qualitative case study research, the purpose of this study was not to achieve broad generalization but to provide a detailed and contextualized understanding of MBKM implementation within a particular institutional setting. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted as context-specific insights, which may inform similar contexts while considering institutional and contextual differences.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### RESULT

The result of the research are presented in this chapter, and the data gathered from the participants is discussed. The objective of this chapter is to examine and explain the findings in the context of the implementation of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) in the English Language Teaching Department at IPB Cirebon. This study's data were collected through interviews and questionnaires. Three lecturers of the English Language Department responded to the interviews, while ten eighth-semester students from the same department participated in the questionnaires.

#### 1. Lecturers' Understanding and Previous Experiences of MBKM

The findings presented in this section are based on interviews conducted with three lecturers from the English Language Teaching Department at IPB Cirebon. This section aims to explore their understanding of the MBKM (Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka) program and their previous experiences in implementing it. The interview question focused on how familiar the lecturers were with MBKM in both theory and practice. The summary of their responses is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

The responses to the first question asked during the interviews.

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Q.1

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<p><b>R.1</b> <i>"I am very familiar with the MBKM program because I am the coordinator for Kampus Mengajar. I know the stages and processes involved. I know about Kampus Mengajar, Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM), and MSIB. Those are the programs I am aware of and have experience with".</i></p>	<p><b>Indicators:</b> Understanding Previous Experience</p>
<p><b>R.2</b> <i>"The MBKM program is about maximizing students' ability to learn independently. It involves understanding learning models and interaction patterns between students and lecturers. One of the programs I have been involved in is Kampus Mengajar, where I participated as a field supervisor or DPL. My understanding mainly focuses on how MBKM is structured and how it is integrated into the higher education curriculum."</i></p>	
<p><b>R.3</b> <i>"I am quite familiar with the MBKM program, both conceptually and in terms of implementation. It is a national policy that gives students the right to study outside their study program for three semesters. I understand that MBKM includes activities such as internships, teaching assistance, student exchanges, research, independent studies, village projects, and humanitarian projects. I have been involved in MBKM as a supervising lecturer for teaching assistance and internships. I also contributed to the development of an MBKM-based curriculum in my study program."</i></p>	

The responses in Table 1 show that all three lecturers demonstrated a strong understanding of the MBKM program, largely shaped by their direct involvement in specific MBKM activities. However, this understanding appears to be influenced by individual roles rather than a uniformly established institutional framework. The variation in lecturers'

experiences ranging from program coordination and field supervision to curriculum development suggests that engagement with MBKM is uneven. This condition may lead to inconsistent interpretation and implementation of MBKM across the department, particularly in aligning learning outcomes within the English Language Teaching curriculum.

Similar patterns have been reported in other Indonesian higher education institutions, where MBKM implementation often relies on a limited number of actively involved lecturers, resulting in coordination challenges and fragmented practices (Werdiningsih et al., 2022). In contrast, international experiential learning models such as work-integrated learning (WIL) emphasize collective institutional readiness and shared responsibility among academic staff. This comparison highlights a structural tension between national policy expectations and institutional capacity, indicating that strong individual commitment alone may not be sufficient to ensure coherent and sustainable MBKM implementation.

## 2. Lecturers' Perceptions and the Impact of MBKM Activities

This section presents findings related to the lecturers' perceptions of MBKM and its perceived impact on students and higher education. The data were collected from interviews with three lecturers in the English Language Teaching Department at IPB Cirebon. The interview question was designed to explore how lecturers viewed the MBKM program and how they perceived its influence on academic and personal development. Their responses are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

The responses to the second question asked during the interviews.

Q.2	
R.1	<i>"I think the program is very good, especially Kampus Mengajar. It helps students gain teaching experience. I find the placement sometimes unsuitable. English education students are mostly placed in elementary schools, while they should be teaching at junior or senior high schools".</i>
R.2	<i>"There are several activities in MBKM, such as Kampus Mengajar and student exchange (PMM). These programs are designed to encourage students to study independently. It also teaches students how to interact</i>

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*with lecturers and peers through the introduction of different learning methods and social groups.”*

**R.3** *“I believe MBKM activities are very relevant to today’s needs. They provide significant opportunities for students to learn outside the classroom, explore their potential, and build competencies. The program encourages collaboration between universities, industries, and society. MBKM positively impacts both soft and hard skill development among students. It improves the relevance of higher education with real-world demands.”*

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The findings indicate that lecturers generally perceived MBKM as a positive and relevant policy that enhances experiential learning, student autonomy, and skill development. Nevertheless, a closer analysis reveals a tension between the pedagogical ideals of MBKM and their practical realization, particularly in the context of English language education. While MBKM is expected to strengthen students’ teaching competencies, the placement of English education students in elementary schools, as noted by one lecturer, suggests a mismatch between program design and disciplinary needs. This misalignment raises concerns about whether MBKM placements consistently support the specific pedagogical and linguistic competencies required at the secondary education level, which is a core orientation of the English Language Teaching curriculum.

Similar challenges have been documented in other Indonesian institutions, where MBKM implementation prioritizes program availability over disciplinary suitability, leading to uneven learning outcomes across departments (Handayani et al., 2022; Rahma et al., 2023). In contrast, international experiential learning frameworks, such as practicum-based teacher education programs in the United Kingdom and Australia, typically emphasize discipline-specific placement and competency alignment to ensure professional relevance. This comparison suggests that while MBKM has strong transformative potential, its impact may be constrained by insufficient contextual adaptation at the institutional level. Consequently, lecturers’ positive perceptions coexist with critical concerns regarding program coherence,

indicating that MBKM’s effectiveness depends not only on its philosophy but also on how flexibly and thoughtfully it is implemented within specific academic disciplines.

### 3. Benefits and Challenges of Participating in MBKM

This section presents the benefits and challenges experienced by the lecturers during their involvement in the MBKM program. The information was obtained from interviews with three lecturers in the English Language Teaching Department at IPB Cirebon. Each participant was asked to describe the positive aspects of MBKM as well as the difficulties encountered during its implementation. Table 3 presents a summary of the responses.

**Table 3**

The responses to the third question asked during the interviews.

<b>Q.3</b>	
<b>R.1</b>	<p><i>"The benefits are many. Students can learn not only in class but also from real-life experiences. I enjoy visiting the schools and seeing their progress.". The challenge is managing the students. They often struggle to submit reports on time and they don't communicate well with their field supervisors. I receive their complaints even though I'm not their direct supervisor."</i></p>
<b>R.2</b>	<p><i>"MBKM opens up horizons for both students and lecturers. It provides students with opportunities to be more active, independent, culturally aware, and apply educational models effectively. Some students are not yet active enough. They do not fully understand the course materials or the expected learning targets."</i></p>
<b>R.3</b>	<p><i>"MBKM has expanded my opportunities to build networks with external partners. I get to understand students' development beyond formal academics. It provides room for interdisciplinary supervision and motivates me to update my teaching methods to be more contextual and practical. Coordination between universities, partner institutions, students, and supervisors are not always optimal. Administrative systems and reporting processes are still complex and time-consuming. Curriculum</i></p>

**Indicators:**  
Benefits  
Challenges

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*adjustment and credit conversion need more alignment.  
Some students are not ready or motivated to join off-  
campus programs.”*

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The findings indicate that lecturers perceived MBKM as a program that offers substantial pedagogical and professional benefits, particularly in expanding students' learning experiences beyond the classroom. MBKM was viewed as enabling students to engage with real educational contexts, develop independence, and apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. For lecturers, the program also created opportunities to observe students' development more holistically and to refine teaching approaches to be more contextual and practice-oriented. These benefits suggest that MBKM aligns well with contemporary demands for experiential and student-centered learning in English language education.

Despite these advantages, the findings also reveal several persistent challenges that complicate MBKM implementation. Lecturers reported difficulties related to student management, communication with field supervisors, and uneven student readiness for off-campus learning. At the institutional level, administrative complexity, weak coordination among stakeholders, and problems related to curriculum adjustment and credit conversion were frequently highlighted. These challenges reflect an inherent tension within MBKM: while the program promotes flexibility and autonomy, it simultaneously requires a high level of organizational capacity and procedural clarity. Without adequate institutional support, the benefits of MBKM risk being undermined by operational constraints.

#### **4. Advantages and Disadvantages of MBKM**

This section presents the advantages and disadvantages of the MBKM program as perceived by the lecturers from the English Language Teaching Department at IPB Cirebon. The data were gathered through interviews with three lecturers, each of whom was asked to identify what they considered the main positive and negative aspects of the program. Table 4 presents a summary of their responses.

**Table 4**

The responses to the fourth question asked during the interviews.

Q.4	
<b>R.1</b>	<p><i>"The advantages is that students can explore their potential and develop other skills. The disadvantage is that it affects campus activities. We are required to convert 20 SKS, but some courses cannot be converted. That makes it difficult, especially from a coordinator's perspective."</i></p>
<b>R.2</b>	<p><i>"Students can explore various learning models, conduct preliminary studies or mini research, and enhance their cognitive abilities. Some students still do not understand the structure or steps of MBKM. Their independent learning and interactions often do not meet the intended objectives."</i></p>
<b>R.3</b>	<p><i>"It provides flexible and diverse learning experiences for students. It improves graduate quality through practical experience, promotes collaboration and innovation in higher education. It also enhances institutional reputation through national engagement. Some institutions lack infrastructure and human resources to support MBKM effectively. There is a gap in expectations between academia and industry. Not all MBKM activities are easy to convert into course credits. Supervision and evaluation in the field are not yet fully optimized."</i></p>

From the lecturers' perspectives, MBKM offers clear advantages in terms of learning flexibility and skill development. The program allows students to explore diverse learning environments, engage in interdisciplinary activities, and gain experiences that are often unavailable within conventional classroom settings. Lecturers emphasized that MBKM supports the development of graduate competencies, enhances institutional visibility through national engagement, and encourages innovation in teaching and learning practices. These

advantages position MBKM as a progressive policy that responds to the evolving demands of higher education.

However, the disadvantages identified by the lecturers point to structural and systemic issues within MBKM implementation. Credit conversion emerged as a recurring concern, particularly when mandatory credit requirements did not align with existing curricula. In addition, disparities in institutional infrastructure and human resources created uneven implementation across programs. Lecturers also noted gaps between academic expectations and industry practices, which sometimes limited the educational value of MBKM activities. These findings suggest that MBKM’s disadvantages are not inherent to the program itself but are largely shaped by institutional capacity and contextual constraints.

### 5. Lecturers’ Readiness and Implementation Strategies

This section explains the lecturers’ readiness to implement the MBKM program and the strategies that have been or should be applied in doing so. Data were collected through interviews with three lecturers from the English Language Teaching Department at IPB Cirebon. The question aimed to identify the level of preparedness among lecturers as well as the approaches used in applying MBKM within the department. Table 5 summarizes the responses from each participant.

**Table 5**

The responses to the fifth question asked during the interviews.

Q.5	
<b>R.1</b>	<i>"I just need to understand the curriculum and the rules. The rest I can manage by myself."</i>
<b>R.2</b>	<i>"Implementation requires gradual curriculum improvement aimed at outcome-based learning. The focus should shift from teacher-talking-time to student-talking-time. Lecturers should introduce learning models and guide students in doing mini research through essays or journals."</i>

**Indicators:**  
Lecturer  
Readiness  
Implement  
ation  
Strategies

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**R.3** *“Lecturers need a deep understanding of MBKM policies and technical implementation. They must prepare flexible curriculum based on learning outcomes and be open to credit conversion. Lecturers should be able to guide and supervise students in non-traditional learning contexts. They must be skilled in collaborating with industry and institutions, adapt to digital reporting systems, assist students in compiling reports and portfolios, and adopt an open and innovative mindset to serve as facilitators, mentors, and guides in real-world learning environments.”*

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The findings demonstrate varying levels of lecturer readiness in implementing MBKM, reflecting different interpretations of professional responsibility and institutional support. Some lecturers viewed readiness as an individual matter, emphasizing personal initiative and familiarity with curriculum guidelines. Others highlighted the need for systematic curriculum redesign, outcome-based learning, and pedagogical shifts toward student-centered approaches. This variation suggests that lecturer readiness is influenced not only by personal competence but also by access to institutional guidance and professional development opportunities.

More critically, the data indicate that effective MBKM implementation requires lecturers to adopt expanded roles beyond traditional teaching. Lecturers are expected to function as facilitators, mentors, and coordinators who can guide students in non-traditional learning contexts while navigating administrative and reporting demands. This expanded role can create professional strain, particularly in the absence of clear technical support and standardized procedures. The findings imply that lecturer readiness should be understood as a collective and institutional issue rather than solely an individual responsibility, emphasizing the need for coordinated strategies and sustained support mechanisms.

## **6. Summary of Student Responses**

Based on the questionnaire responses, the overall perception of the MBKM program can be concluded among students in the English Language Teaching Department at IPB Cirebon is highly positive. Most of the students had already participated in MBKM activities and found them beneficial for both academic and personal development. The responses indicated that the program is not only accessible and well-received but also provides learning

experiences that students consider meaningful and relevant. A large number of students agreed that MBKM contributes to the development of skills needed for future careers. The program was seen as helpful in building both academic knowledge and practical abilities, including communication, independence, and adaptability. Additionally, students mentioned that studying in different environments helped them gain new perspectives and broaden their understanding, which aligns with the core goals of MBKM.

Although some responses highlighted challenges such as unclear procedures or varying experiences, these issues were reported only by a small portion of the respondents. The majority expressed enthusiasm for the program and stated a strong willingness to recommend it to others. This reflects a high level of student satisfaction and suggests that MBKM is meeting its objectives in supporting student-centered and experiential learning. In conclusion, the student feedback supports the idea that MBKM is functioning as a relevant and impactful educational initiative. The responses offer useful insights for institutions to maintain what is working well and to improve the aspects that still need more attention, particularly in ensuring consistency and clarity for all participants.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings revealed that lecturers in the English Language Teaching Department at IPB Cirebon generally possessed a clear understanding of the MBKM program and its objectives. Most respondents recognized MBKM as an initiative that encourages student independence, creativity, and practical learning through flexible study pathways such as internships and teaching assistance. This understanding aligns with Werdiningsih et al. (2022), who emphasized that lecturer readiness and institutional collaboration are essential for effective MBKM implementation. Guided by Piaget's constructivist theory, lecturers have begun to shift from content delivery to facilitation, enabling students to construct knowledge through direct engagement. However, some lecturers noted limited technical guidance and uneven institutional support, indicating the need for more consistent professional development and coordination in implementing MBKM policies.

Both lecturers and students perceived MBKM as a transformative policy that enhances contextual and experiential learning in English language education. The program promotes

interactive, project-based instruction that connects academic theory with real-world practice. As supported by Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory, these activities foster critical thinking and reflection, leading to deeper language acquisition and improved communicative competence. Lecturers reported that MBKM encourages student autonomy and collaboration, while students expressed higher motivation and confidence when applying their English skills in authentic settings. Nevertheless, challenges such as credit conversion issues, supervision difficulties, and infrastructure limitations remain prevalent. These findings are consistent with Hidayat et al. (2022), who observed that inadequate technical preparation and administrative readiness often hinder MBKM's full implementation, particularly in smaller institutions.

Overall, the implementation of MBKM in the English Language Teaching Department demonstrates substantial benefits despite its structural challenges. It provides students with valuable exposure to professional environments and supports the development of higher-order competencies outlined in KKNi Level 6, including problem-solving, accountability, and adaptability. The program's strengths lie in its flexibility, cross-disciplinary opportunities, and alignment with modern pedagogical principles. However, sustainable success requires stronger institutional planning, clear assessment rubrics, and ongoing lecturer training. The findings imply that MBKM can significantly enhance English language education by promoting experiential, student-centered learning—provided that administrative systems, curriculum design, and external partnerships are effectively integrated and continuously evaluated.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program in the English Language Teaching Department at Institut Prima Bangsa Cirebon, focusing on lecturers' and students' perceptions as well as its implications for teaching and learning practices. The findings indicate that MBKM has contributed positively to the promotion of experiential, student-centered learning and has encouraged the development of professional competencies relevant to English language education. Lecturers generally demonstrated a strong understanding of MBKM principles, while students perceived the program as beneficial for enhancing practical skills, adaptability, and real-world learning experiences. Despite these strengths, the study also revealed persistent challenges related to curriculum alignment, administrative procedures, student readiness, and institutional support, which influence the consistency and effectiveness of MBKM implementation.

This study is not without limitations. The research involved a relatively small number of participants from a single department, and the findings therefore reflect a context-specific perspective rather than a comprehensive representation of MBKM implementation across institutions. As a qualitative case study, the results are intended to provide in-depth insights into a particular educational context and should be interpreted accordingly. Future research is recommended to involve multiple institutions, diverse academic disciplines, and a broader range of participants to capture more varied experiences of MBKM implementation. Comparative studies across institutions or between national and international experiential learning models may further enrich understanding of how MBKM can be adapted and strengthened. In addition, longitudinal research examining the long-term impact of MBKM on graduates' professional development and employability would offer valuable contributions to the ongoing evaluation of this national policy.

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