

Exploration of Industry Partner Support in the Implementation of Internships in the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program

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ABSTRACT

The independent learning campus policy (MBKM) by the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia has given a new nuance in implementing education in higher education. Students through MBKM are given the right to get hands-on experience in the field for a minimum of three semesters through eight activity programs, one of which is an internship in industry. Industrial internships are learning activities off campus or in the field that involve students, universities, and industry. Partner industries strongly influence the success of this internship program, as industrial internships in the MBKM program require students to study in partner industries for six months. The purpose of this study is to describe the support of industrial partners in the implementation of industrial internships and to describe the forms of industrial support in realizing student independence in learning. This research is a qualitative descriptive study. The research was conducted in 39 partner industries in the industrial internship program for students of the Automotive Engineering Faculty of Engineering, Yogyakarta State University, in 2020, spread throughout Indonesia. Data collection techniques are forum discussion groups (FGD) and documentation. The results show that at the MBKM internship planning stage, partner industries have been involved in mapping the number of students who can participate in the program, offering models of internship forms according to partner industry conditions, and evaluation models that allow optimizing the implementation of internships. At the internship implementation stage, the partner industry supports students conducting industrial practices in their field of interest. It will enable participants to analyze partner industry deficiencies, find solutions, and apply them directly to the field.

Keywords: Partner Industry Support, Industrial Internships, Freedom Learning Campus, Freedom.

INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy established by the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia has become a new policy that must be implemented by all educational institutions, including universities (Baro'ah, 2020; Maisyaroh et al., 2021). *Merdeka Belajar* is an extraordinary concept that aims to provide freedom for teachers and students to carry out a fun and meaningful teaching and learning process. This policy responds to the fact that both teachers and students have often felt burdened and constrained by systems that do not suit their needs (Ainia, 2020). The MBKM policy aims to create an independent, flexible, and dynamic higher education learning process, ultimately fostering an innovative and creative learning culture aligned with students' conditions and needs (Baharuddin, 2021; Fuadi & Aswita,

2021). Suppose such a learning culture can be realized. In that case, it will directly strengthen the relationship between higher education and the needs of the business and industrial sectors. It will also prepare students to enter the workforce earlier, thus reducing the waiting period for employment after graduation (Wahyudi et al., 2021).

The legal basis for the MBKM policy refers to Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 3 of 2020 concerning the National Standards for Higher Education (SNPT), Article 18. This regulation stipulates that the fulfillment of the study duration and academic load for both bachelor's and applied bachelor's students can be carried out through two main pathways: (1) completing all learning activities within their study program according to the academic load set by the university; or (2) taking part of their learning activities in their study program and the rest outside their program, either within the same faculty, university, or at another institution. Nurwandani, as cited in Tohir (2020), explains that the MBKM program provides students with both challenges and opportunities to develop creativity, personality, independence, and self-management holistically by seeking and discovering knowledge directly in real-life contexts—through social dynamics, collaboration, goal-setting, and achievement.

MBKM consists of four central policies (Tohir, 2020): one related to study programs, one related to the university accreditation system, one concerning transforming universities into legal entities, and one related to students' learning rights. Concerning the latter, the MBKM policy grants students the right to study for three semesters outside their study program, whether within the same faculty, university, or outside institutions—including industries, businesses, and communities. Off-campus learning activities include internships/work practices, village projects, teaching in schools, student exchanges, research, entrepreneurial projects, independent studies/projects, and humanitarian projects, all of which academic mentors must still supervise. The Kampus Merdeka initiative is expected to provide students with contextual and practical experiences that enhance their competencies and make them more job-ready.

One of the most engaging components of the MBKM program is the internship or work practice program. According to Sun (2014), an internship is a structured program that provides students with professional work experience under the guidance of experts in their respective fields. Internships are highly beneficial for students because they are guided by field supervisors who train and advise them to understand workplace culture and adapt to new environments. Internships also teach students new industry-relevant skills while helping them understand how to work effectively. Through internships, students realize that what they have learned in university serves as preparation for their future careers.

The internship program benefits students and provides advantages for companies that offer internship opportunities. Lerman (2019) highlights at least five benefits for companies that effectively manage internship programs: contributing to production or service costs, reducing the expenses of new team member recruitment if the company retains interns, lowering training costs for new hires to familiarize themselves with

tools and work environments, increasing the company's experience in managing internship programs, and viewing internship expenses as part of the company's investment in future development.

However, the program may not benefit the company if internship management is poor. [Baert et al. \(2021\)](#) found that some companies fail to gain tangible benefits from student internships. Similarly, [Lerman \(2019\)](#) stated that the return on investment for internships can be minimal because many interns join other companies afterward, making it difficult for companies to measure the profitability of internship implementation.

The above discussion illustrates that internships do not always provide full company benefits, especially if not managed properly. On the other hand, internship programs require substantial investment, most of which the host companies bear. For student interns, inadequate facilitation during internships can be disadvantageous, as they invest significant time, energy, and financial resources.

This study aims to describe the support of industry partners in the implementation of industrial internships and to identify the forms of industry support in realizing student learning autonomy under the MBKM program.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a qualitative descriptive study. The study was conducted in 39 partner industries involved in the industrial internship program for students of the Automotive Engineering Education Department, Faculty of Engineering, Yogyakarta State University, in 2020. It was spread across various regions in Indonesia.

Data collection techniques included Focus Group Discussions (FGD), observations, and documentation activities conducted directly with industry representatives and student interns. These methods were used to obtain comprehensive and in-depth information about the implementation and support provided by partner industries during the internship program.

The FGD sessions served as a forum for gathering insights, experiences, and feedback from industry mentors and company representatives regarding the internship process's structure, challenges, and effectiveness. Observations were carried out to directly understand the real conditions in the field, while documentation provided supporting data such as reports, attendance records, and activity logs related to internship implementation.

Data were then analyzed descriptively, aiming to portray the actual conditions, responses, and forms of industry support throughout the internship program. The descriptive analysis allowed the researcher to identify key patterns and summarize findings that reflect the overall involvement of industry partners in realizing the goals of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Industry Partner Responses to the Six-Month Internship Program

Industry partners participating in the internship program for students of the Department of Automotive Engineering Education, Faculty of Engineering, Yogyakarta State University (UNY) in 2023 can be categorized based on the types of service facilities and business fields. The distribution of partner industries is presented below:

Table 1. Classification of Industry Partners Based on Service Facilities

No.	Type of Service Facility	Number	Percentage
1.	Authorized Dealers	29	74.35%
2.	General Workshops	7	17.94%
3.	Specialized Workshops	3	7.71%

Table 2. Classification of Industry Partners Based on Business Fields

No.	Business Field	Number	Percentage
1.	Body and Painting	1	2.56%
2.	Spooring and Balancing	2	5.12%
3.	Maintenance and Repair	5	12.82%
4.	Maintenance, Repair, and Sales	31	79.49%

Data collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) revealed that, in general, all 39 partner industries responded positively to the six-month internship program. Most industry representatives agreed that the extended duration was appropriate to provide students with meaningful and realistic work experience. They believed six months was sufficient for students to fully engage in industrial activities, understand company operations, and adapt to the professional environment. The longer duration also allowed students to gain hands-on experience in different departments, enriching their practical understanding and technical competence.

Furthermore, industry partners expressed that a six-month internship enables them to assess better the students' work quality, discipline, and work ethic. The extended timeframe facilitates a more accurate evaluation process, as supervisors can observe students' progress and consistency over time. In addition, the industries highlighted that by the third month, students generally become more independent and productive, allowing companies to benefit directly from their contributions. This mutual advantage—students gaining valuable experience and industries receiving additional support—illustrates the effectiveness of a longer internship duration in achieving the objectives of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* program.

2. Industry Partner Support During the Internship Planning Phase

The data analysis indicated that industry partners played an active role in the planning stage of the internship program by offering and introducing internship models tailored to the specific characteristics and operational needs of their respective industries. This customized approach ensured that the internship program not only aligned with the real-world context of each company but also supported the achievement of academic equivalence for students, amounting to 20 credits. By designing models that connected theoretical knowledge with practical experience, the industry partners created a more meaningful and engaging learning environment that bridged the gap between academia and professional practice.

Furthermore, industry partners also contributed by preparing and participating in student briefing sessions before the internship commenced. These sessions were designed to equip students to understand the company's work culture, organizational structure, and professional expectations, helping them adapt quickly once the internship begins. Through these briefings, students gained valuable insight into the industrial context where they would spend the next six months, fostering readiness, confidence, and a clear sense of purpose. This collaborative preparation stage strengthened the partnership between educational institutions and industries, ensuring that academic goals and professional standards were effectively met.

3. Industry Partner Support During the Implementation Phase of MBKM Internships

Observation and documentation during the internship process revealed that industry partners provided substantial support to ensure the effective implementation of the MBKM internship program. One key form of support was the assignment of field supervisors who were carefully matched to the students' respective areas of study and internship placements. These supervisors played a crucial role in guiding students' professional development, monitoring their progress, and ensuring the internship experience was relevant and aligned with academic and industrial objectives. Additionally, the scheduling of internship activities was structured according to the students' learning goals and the internship guidelines established by the Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY). This alignment helped maintain consistency between academic requirements and practical workplace experience, ensuring the internship fulfilled its educational purpose while meeting industry standards.

Moreover, industry partners facilitated a dynamic learning experience by allowing students to rotate or work across multiple departments and divisions relevant to their academic fields. This exposure provided a comprehensive understanding of industrial operations and encouraged interdisciplinary learning. Students were also encouraged to conduct analyses of the industry's strengths and weaknesses, fostering critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. Beyond that, industries supported innovation by motivating students to propose constructive feedback and practical solutions to real challenges encountered in the workplace. In some cases, companies even provided financial or logistical assistance to help realize these innovative ideas, demonstrating a

strong commitment to nurturing creativity, collaboration, and applied learning within the MBKM framework.

Discussion

The Department of Automotive Engineering Education, Faculty of Engineering, Yogyakarta State University, is one of Indonesia's institutions that specifically prepares future vocational education teachers and instructors for both educational and industrial training institutions. Therefore, combining theoretical learning (in classrooms and libraries) and practical knowledge (in workshops, laboratories, and industries) is crucial. Such a mixed learning model helps bridge the competency gap between graduates and the skills demanded by industry and business sectors.

Graduates' quality measures vocational education's success and how relevant their competencies are to industrial needs. Ellis (in Djatnika, 2018) notes that many industries face recruitment dilemmas because applicants often possess high academic skills but lack practical experience in the required field.

The research findings show that most of the internship industry partners in the 2020 program were authorized dealers (74.35%). This indicates that the internship network involves high-quality workshops representing leading global automotive manufacturers. Consequently, students receive direct supervision from professional experts, enabling them to develop practical skills and workplace discipline. Students also gain exposure to international-standard work cultures and have the opportunity to enhance their communication and adaptability—essential competencies for future professionals.

Djatnika (2018) emphasizes that modern employees are expected not only to master their technical fields but also to adapt to new work environments, communicate effectively, demonstrate leadership, and exhibit efficient performance.

The dominance of authorized dealers among industry partners also reflects the trust in the university's internship management system. This partnership suggests that UNY has successfully implemented professional internship management practices that benefit students and industries. According to Ismail (2018), industry partners gain short-term advantages from internships by obtaining motivated, low-cost labor. In the long term, industries benefit from access to well-trained human resources and reduced recruitment risks, as internships serve as extended probationary periods.

Findings indicate that most industry partners support the six-month internship duration under the MBKM program. Their reasoning aligns with Lerman (2019), who illustrated the relationship between industry benefit, internship duration, and student gain through a linear and hyperbolic graph. The graph shows that companies may incur losses at the beginning of the internship due to students' low productivity. Still, students and companies benefit significantly over time once students become competent contributors.

Further, industry participation in planning and evaluating internships demonstrates strong institutional commitment. These two phases are critical for ensuring high-quality outcomes. Ismail (2018) emphasizes that the success of an internship program is

determined by the quality of human resources managing it, from planning and implementation to monitoring and evaluation. Therefore, the active involvement of company leaders and field supervisors is essential throughout all stages, mainly since MBKM internships last six months and are conducted entirely within industrial settings.

This study also found that students could identify and solve real industrial problems using their innovations under expert supervision. This practice exemplifies the "freedom to learn" (merdeka belajar) principle in the MBKM program, fostering students' creativity and problem-solving abilities. As Ismail (2018) suggests, interns should be given autonomy to make decisions, engage in self-reflection to evaluate their progress, and be encouraged to focus on completing assigned responsibilities effectively.

CONCLUSIONS

The support of industry partners in implementing internships under the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program includes several key aspects. First, industry partners welcomed the extension of the internship duration to improve quality and provide students with more realistic and comprehensive work experience. During the planning stage, their support involved introducing various internship models tailored to each industry's characteristics and participating in student briefing sessions before placement. During the implementation stage, industry partners provided qualified supervisors in relevant fields. They offered students opportunities to innovate and solve real industrial problems according to their interests, reflecting the true spirit of independent learning.

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