

## Adjusting the Course Structure for Facilitating the MBKM Program

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### Abstract

*The current case study was to analyze the course credit conversion of MBKM experienced by 40 university students who join the student exchange and pre-teacher service. Through the individual interviews among the participants, the study found that there were several reasons why they join the MBKM programs. However, started from the piloting program of both MBKM, the credit conversion has still become the main problem not only among students, but also the university. The discussion was brought under the scope of the structure of the spreading of course unit throughout the semesters. The study suggests that the courses should be redesigned by placing the main course at the beginning of the course: semester one to three, and the last semester. Whereas, the semesters depicted to MBKM were on semester five to seven. It means that the converted course units were on semester five to seven as well.*

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## Introduction

The main goal of the higher education institution practices is to prepare the graduates as on the future workplace requirements (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 12 Tahun 2012 Tentang Pendidikan Tinggi [Law No. 12 Year 2012 on Higher Education], 2012). Unfortunately, some studies found that university graduates face serious problems in finding jobs. The graduates should cultivate their personal character, knowledge and skills (both soft and hard skills for the future jobs) during their higher education process (Holmes, 2013). Moreover, the higher education institution should link the students' future job requirements to the course outcomes so that the graduates would be well-prepared (Clarke, 2018). Through the Freedom to learn-Freedom Campus or "Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka" (MBKM)

policy, the government facilitates the university students to be autonomous in their learning for achieving the employment readiness by enrolling one semester outside their department and to have outside campus activities in maximum two semesters for building their job experience and skills (Holmes, 2013; Kementrian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan [the Ministry of Education and Culture], 2020).

The outside MBKM programs consist of nine programs namely student exchange, internship, pre-teacher service, research, humanity project, entrepreneurship, independent study, thematic community service, and conscription. Each program is equivalent to 20 course unit credits. It means that the students who join one of these programs in would get maximum 20 credit conversion to suitable course units in their department. The system, for sure, makes the study finish quicker.

However, the MBKM policy has been debatable up to now as Indonesia has not applied the MBKM concept before (Putera & Sugianto, 2020). Even though some higher education institutions, actually have run some of the similar programs, such as pre-teacher service programs in schools in Indonesia or abroad independently or facilitated by Seameo. The pre-teacher service programs are commonly run by those higher education institution whose faculty of education. As the pre-teacher service program is mostly a part of the curriculum, there is no problem appearing during the program.

In MBKM program, there is also similar program as the pre-teacher service named Kampus Mengajar (KM-Teaching Campus). The difference lays on the students' backgrounds. On the KM program, students from various course backgrounds such as the social and natural sciences are allowed to join. It means that the KM program is not the privilege of the students from the education courses. Consequently, the course unit credit conversion has become a complicated issue since the MBKM programs do not often fit to the students' course goal. Though the department stakeholders have been merged the MBKM programs into the department curriculum, MBKM programs have still remained problems on course unit credit conversion. Some prefer to apply the fully or partial equivalence of the 20 course unit credits. Consequently, some students rethink to participate the MBKM programs due to the length of the study and the study workloads.

Since the piloting project of the MBKM programs in 2020, several problems have been occurred on supporting systems as well as the human resources. The programs, however, have been getting better after some improvements on the program preparation, learning management system, funding, and evaluation. Unfortunately, the conversion of the course unit credit for the students have still remained. Some students still could get the expected numbers of course unit credit conversion. The current study offered an idea on reframing the curriculum which supports the implementation of the MBKM programs by providing space to students in getting suitable course unit credit conversion.

## **Method**

The present study applied a case study which invited 40 university students who joined two MBKM programs (student exchange and pre-teacher service) between 2020 and 2022. Those students were from some areas in Indonesia: Yogyakarta, Jakarta, Makassar, Bali, Bengkulu, and Kalimantan. The details of the research methodology are explained below.

## Research Design

The current case study was applied to dig out the information from the participants related to the MBKM practice in some universities in Indonesia. As the MBKM program consists of nine programs with different conditions and characteristics, the current study focused on the two MBKM programs namely the student exchange and the pre-teacher service.

## Participants of the Study

The current case study invited 40 university students who involved the student exchange and pre-teacher service programs of MBKM.

Table: 2 The Information of the Participants

MBKM Programs	Number of Participants	University Location
Piloting Student Exchange ( <i>Permata Sakti</i> )	6	Yogyakarta
	2	Jakarta
	2	Makassar
Student Exchange ( <i>Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka</i> )	1	Bali
	2	Makassar
Piloting Pre-teacher Service ( <i>Kampus Mengajar Perintis</i> )	3	Bengkulu
	10	Yogyakarta
Pre-teacher Service Batch 1 (Kampus Mengajar Angkatan 1)	1	Sulawesi
	1	Kalimantan
	3	Bengkulu
Pre-teacher Service Batch 2	3	Yogyakarta
	5	Yogyakarta
	1	Semarang

## 3. Instruments

The information from the participants were gathered from individual interview. The semi-structure interview was focused on the two main questions on the reasons of joining the MBKM and their perception and experience on the credit conversion on their campus.

## 4. Data Analysis Techniques

The interview data which were gained from either a face-to-face interview or online interview via zoom and WhatsApps application were then analyzed quantitatively. Those data were transcribed, coded, analyzed, and displayed in a table.

## Results and Discussion

The present study focuses on the two major questions on the participants' reasons in joining the MBKM program, and their perception on the practice of credit conversion in their university. The synthesized results from those questions were displayed in the table. The table 2 shows that the students who shared their ideas in joining the two MBKM programs shares similar reasons on getting financial support and new experience. Regarding to the credit conversion practice of the MBKM Program, some students said that they were happy with the maximum credit conversion. However, some were not happy as they could not get the maximum credit conversion due to the different learning outcomes of the MBKM program and the course units in their course department. Surprisingly, three students received credit conversion for their bachelor thesis.

The changing of the curriculum is commonly the response of the development of the technology, the society need, and the graduate stakeholder need. The shifting from the offline learning mode to the online certainly requires the technology mastery for supporting the teaching and learning process. Moreover, the government regulates that curriculum must be revisited every 3 to 5 years. The changing of the curriculum in Indonesia is significantly seen recently through MBKM programs. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture set maximum three semester learning outside the campus as the process of gaining job experience (Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi [the National Standard of Higher Education], 2020). The changing, however, invites problems in practice. Some prefer to apply the curriculum equivalence in which the university students follow the new curriculum.

Table: 2 The reasons of joining the MBKM Program

MBKM Programs	Reasons of joining MBKM	Credit Conversion
Student Exchange	1. Pointed by the course convener	- Some got maximum credit conversion
	2. Experiencing new environment	
	3. Getting financial support	
	4. Gaining new knowledge	- Some got less than the maximum credit conversion
	5. Networking	
	6. Wishing of living in different place	
Pre-teacher Service	1. Pointed by the course convener	- Three students got bachelor thesis conversion
	2. Interested in getting credit conversion	
	3. Getting financial support	
	4. Getting new experience	

In the beginning of the MBKM program, many universities as well as the MBKM program partners were bewildered with several rules released by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture. However, gradually, by learning by doing, more parties enable to adapt the MBKM programs.

Some universities had not been ready yet with the program due to limited information and preparation. The information on the program was mostly spread through the groups of university leaders in Indonesia via WhatsApp Groups. The information, for sure, was often late reaching the participants target. It results on the limited preparation. The university coordinator of the program took quick action by pointing the prospective and eligible students to join the program.

The ten university students of the present study participants who are from Yogyakarta, Jakarta, and Makassar and joined the Permata Sakti (the piloting project of the Student Exchange of MBKM) were sent to other campuses in Indonesia which were located in different province or island. From the interview, all participants admitted that they were pointed by the course conveners in their campuses without sufficient information on the programs. They also did not get adequate preparation for joining the program. As a result, four of the participants mentioned that they were two weeks late in joining the course unit enrolment. Furthermore, some lecturing system and administration requirements in the targeted campus were different from their home university. For example, the Learning Management System (LMS) used was

different. It required sometimes to learn and adapt the new environment. Another example laid on the language used in the classroom. The two participants said that they were quite insecure and under stress when they realized that the language used in the teaching and learning process in the Public Speaking unit in one of universities in Yogyakarta was English. As both were from the Public Administration Course in one of universities in Makassar, they felt hopeless and often skipped the class.

Similarly, among the participants of the current study, there were 13 students joining Kampus Mengajar Perintis (KMP=Pioneering of Pre-teacher Service Program) who were also pointed by the course conveners in their campuses. They were sent to six different primary schools in Indonesia. In 2020, the piloting project of Pre-teacher Service invited around 1,500 university students to join. They were sent to primary schools spread in all provinces in Indonesia with one MBKM mentor for 12-13 university students.

The students frequently followed what the campus instructed even though they were a bit confused what they should do. Two of the participants of the current study admitted that they did not even know what the program was. They struggled to dig out further information from the course convener. Unfortunately, most lecturers were absence of the MBKM Pre-teacher Service Program. In other words, the students, in this case, were preparing and learning the program along with doing the program. As the two students were also enrolling the similar program from their campus, they discussed with the supervisor for getting permission of leaving the Pre-teacher Service from the campus and join the Pre-teacher Service of MBKM. Unluckily, the supervisor did not allow them to leave the campus pre-teacher service otherwise they would not pass the course unit. They had no choice. They finally left the MBKM Pre-teacher Service without telling the MBKM Pre-teacher Service mentor. Consequently, on the first monitoring, the primary school headmaster who was responsible on the MBKM Pre-teacher Service was complaining. For the case, the present participants explained that their MBKM mentor negotiated with the headmaster. There were some points discussed on the negotiation; 1) the headmaster requested the students to exchange the days they were absent with other days after the program, 2) the mentor offered collaborative research between the students, teacher, and lecturer. Both were conducted well even though the students a bit regretted as the headmaster asked them to extend two more weeks. The students could not enable to refuse due to cultural ethics. Thus, three prominent parties involved in the piloting project of the Pre-teacher Service namely university, students and primary schools seemed to be learning by doing.

Besides, the technological system of MBKM application had not been well-prepared for supporting the program. Though the system was completed with several menu which allowed all parties in the program enable to save, report, and recall the data related to the personal information, activities, and assessment, the MBKM system frequently got down. It invited many complaints from the users as they had to input the data again. Furthermore, the program was not supported by the sufficient human resources. During the preparation, implementation and evaluation processes, various problems faced by the university students, mentors, university coordinator, and schools. Unfortunately, the KMP committee barely responded the problems quickly.

Overall, the piloting projects on the student exchange and the pre-teacher service programs of the MBKM left various problems not only on the students, but also university and

partners. The numerous problems appeared on the piloting project of the KMP were then analyzed closely for preparing the Pre-teacher Service Batch 1. The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture started to blast the information widely through networking, social media, and mass media. More students and universities grasped the information and began to compete on the program.

The finding of the current study also found that the students started to own various reasons on their involvement on the two MBKM programs seen on the present study. Started from 2021, the student exchange was labelled as *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* which was conducted in offline, online or mixed depending on the situation in each area in Indonesia. The students had more freedom in choosing the PMM scheme fitted on them, for example taking maximum 20 credits on the targeted university, or took credits on the targeted and the home university. The technological support system of the MBKM had been developed as the students were easier in searching, analyzing and finally deciding the course and university they preferred based on the course description and syllabus share on the PMM learning management system called *Spada Dikti*. In other words, the students have fully freedom in enrolling the course they love to. Meanwhile, in the Pre-teacher Service program, the students got more freedom as well in choosing the nearest school to their residences. The schools, of course, should meet some requirements such as belonged to the national accreditation maximum B, located in the remote area, and on the green areas of the COVID-19 coverage.

However, the similar problems as on the piloting projects still existed up to now. The most prominent one laid on the credit conversion. On the student exchange program, the conversion cases were less than on the pre-teacher service program. On the former program, commonly, the targeted university had provided the course description including the number of credits, syllabus, and learning outcomes. Knowing the information, of course, eased the home university to convert into the same or nearly similar to the courses in the home university. Conversely, on the student exchange required more complex analysis on the credit conversion decision.

On the KMP, the credit conversion was maximum six credits, while on the Pre-teacher Service Batch 1, it increased double. The Batch 2 onwards offer maximum 20 credit conversion. From the Table 1, it can be seen that the participants experienced differently related to the credit conversion. Some gained the maximum credit conversion, less than the maximum, and even got the bachelor thesis conversion. The conversion process, principally, is started by analyzing the activities done by the students on the MBKM program. The results are, then, used to match the learning outcomes of the course unit converted. If the activities and outcomes of the MBKM program does not fit to the course unit learning outcomes, the MBKM credits are transferred to the Diploma Supplement (*Surat Keterangan Pendamping Ijazah = SKPI*). The notable case appeared was that three students got credit conversion on their bachelor thesis. Based on the interview with the three students who got the credit conversion on the bachelor thesis, some requirements were applied to fulfill the converted credits. The students were on the semester 8 in which they did not have any course units to be taken anymore. Another consideration was that the students under the bachelor thesis supervisors enabled to publish a journal article indexed nationally. The supervision on the credit conversion, though, was not be done thoroughly.

The one of the main goals in launching the MBKM is to prepare the university graduates who are ready in facing the workplace competition. Consequently the university should adapt their curriculum to the MBKM programs (Nanggala & Suryadi, 2020). The universities in Indonesia vary in responding to the MBKM in term of converted credit such as maximum 20 credits, less than 20 credits, or even none.

Based on the national standard of the higher education regulation, the bachelor students should spend minimum 144 credits for acquiring the bachelor degree (Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi [the National Standard of Higher Education], 2020). The spreading of the credits on semester depends on the management of the course department as along as the courses cover all general, core, and elective courses which are commonly set by the national course association. The ideal structure of the spread of courses is placing the core courses on semester one to four, and eight, while the rest semesters are depicted to the MBKM programs (Sriwijaya, 2022). It means that at least the students spend around four semesters for reaching the minimum requirements.

As most MBKM programs were set for minimum on semester four, it would be suitable if the university adjusts the core courses on the semester one to four with 24 credits each semester. Commonly, the general courses such as Bahasa, Civic course, religion, and English are placed on semester one to three. These general courses should be moved to the semester five, six, or seven in which the MBKM programs can be converted with. Converting the Modul Nusantara (one of compulsory contents on the student exchange which focuses on Indonesian intra cultures), for example, is linear to the Civic course, or Cross Culture Understanding. One of universities in Indonesia places 84 credits in semester one to five for the general and core courses of the course department, 20 credits in semester six for studying outside the course department (elective courses) and pre-teacher service, and the forty credits in semester seven and eight for learning outside the campus and writing the bachelor thesis (Baharuddin, 2021). It means that the course department curriculum was mainly divided into two major classifications: 1) the core and elective courses which support the uniqueness of the course department outcomes and were placed on semester one to five and eight, 2) MBKM adaptation courses on semester six to eight.

Providing opportunity for joining MBKM on semester eight, though, is risky. First, the MBKM program is converted on bachelor thesis writing. Three participants (one from the department of Mechanical Engineering Vocational Education, and two from the Primary Teacher Education) in the current study experienced on it. However, equivalencing MBKM program especially pre-teacher service program should be revisited. Those who are from the department of Primary Teacher Education, the equivalence has meaning as the MBKM pre-teacher service program takes place in primary schools. The students enable to apply their knowledge of assisting the primary teachers in designing learning media, technological adaptation and administration management assistance. The three main objectives of the MBKM pre-teacher service fit on the learning outcomes of the Primary Teacher Education students. However, for the student of the Mechanical Engineering Vocational Education, converting the MBKM pre-teacher service to the bachelor thesis writing is quite far from the course learning outcome. One of the prominent considerations lays on the characteristic of the Mechanical Engineering Vocational Education learning outcomes. The graduates of the Mechanical Engineering Vocational Education are expected to be teachers or educators in

vocational high schools. Whereas, the targeted schools of the MBKM pre-teacher service are in the primary schools. From this point of view, the targeted future job and competences of the graduate of the Mechanical Engineering Vocational Education is not linear to the MBKM pre-service teacher program.

Another attention is on the process. On the bachelor thesis writing, the students follow several rules and procedure in commonly minimum one semester. They should be supervised and accompanied by eligible lecturers for the planning of the research, doing the research, writing the bachelor thesis, examination in front of the board of the examiners, and the publication. Furthermore, the scopes of the bachelor thesis research are in line to the graduate learning outcomes. In the Primary Teacher Education Department, for example, the graduates are expected to be teachers in primary schools. It means that what they experienced in MBKM pre-teacher service fits to the graduate learning outcomes. However, on writing a journal article, the rules and procedure are simpler. The students only follow the requirements of the targeted journal article template for writing. On the process, it frequently does not require much efforts and supervision from the lecturers. Another missing point from the process is the examination. A journal article writing does not entail examination from the broad of examiners for testing the all contents and writing styles of the paper. Therefore, writing bachelor thesis and journal article cannot be treated similarly. It also implies that equivalencing the pre-teacher service to bachelor thesis writing by substituting writing a journal article is not acceptable in this case. Nevertheless, it also does not mean that it is impossible.

Equivalencing the pre-teacher service to the bachelor thesis writing by writing a journal article might be possible with some considerations. First, the course department adjust the curriculum by expanding the graduate learning outcomes which are also support the MBKM programs. The bachelor thesis writing allows the students to connect their competences into the MBKM programs they involve in. For instance, the students of English Education Department conduct research dealing with the English teaching, learning and acquisition among young learners. Started from 2021, the MBKM pre-teacher service program has been expanded to the junior high school. The equivalence is more possible than before as the graduate learning outcomes are in alignment to the MBKM program.

Though it not a MBKM pre-teacher service, an English Education Department student did bachelor thesis research when she did a Sea-Teacher program from SEAMOLEC in Thailand in 2019. The research was about the second language acquisition among junior high school in the junior high school in Thailand where she run her pre-teacher service (Kaban et al., 2021). Similarly, another student also did the same. He conducted his bachelor thesis research in a junior high school in the Philippines (Widyastuti et al., 2021). Both students under the supervision of the eligible lecturers designed the research design such as the instruments and data collection method. During their pre-teacher service in the schools, they also conducted the research under the teacher and school supervision. In this point, of course, the students should collect the consent letters from the participants and permission from the school authority as well. The data analysis and writing the bachelor thesis were then done straight away after all data collected without waiting for the end of the program. Thus, the model of converting pre-teacher service program is possible to be applied in the MBKM pre-teacher service program with some conditions.



## Conclusion

The implementation of the two MBKM programs namely the student exchange and the pre-teacher service which were piloted in 2020 has still left some problems. Though the students' intentions in joining these programs vary, the credit conversion still becomes the prominent case. If their involvement on the MBKM programs cannot be converted maximumly on their credits, it can be predicted that the students will spend more time studying in their university. Whereas, one of the major goals of the MBKM is to shorten the length of study. The university should adjust their curriculum to the MBKM programs by placing the main course units at the semester one, two, three, four, and eight. The rest semesters, namely semester five, six, and seven, are depicted for the MBKM program and elective courses.

## Recommendations

Please add recommendations here. The Tamansiswa International Journal in Education and Science (TIJES) is a peer-reviewed research journal published in April and October regularly. For one publication session, there are 5 selected papers. The TIJES welcomes any academic research papers and conceptual papers internationally concerning on education and sciences.

The sent articles must be original, unpublished and not be sent to other journals. During the publication process started from acceptance, review, revision and production, the papers cannot be withdrawn without the editorial approval.

## Acknowledgements or Notes

Please add acknowledgements or notes here. Place the acknowledgements and notes in the separate section before the references.

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