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Employability of Higher Education Graduates in the Perspective of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)

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ABSTRACT

Background

Changes in the global order of life also have an impact on higher education transformation in higher education is carried out for universities to adapt to the needs of society and industry. The role of higher education in producing human resources is to produce graduates with a number of abilities that adjust the needs of industry and the world of work in society, which is defined by employability skills.

Purpose

The writing in this journal reviews how the MBKM curriculum policy is a policy rolled out by the government as an effort to fulfill the employability of higher education graduates.

Design/method/approach

Through a literature review analyzed from concepts and theories regarding the employability of higher education graduates and the implementation of the MBKM policy.

Results

The results expected by writing this journal can provide a comprehensive overview of the conditions and role of higher education in producing graduates, supported by government policies that regulate regulations and the need for cooperation between industries in the role of the tri darma of higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

The world has changed in the global order of life starting from the 21st century era and the demands of the industrial era 4.0 where these changes then have an impact on education which continues to undergo a transformation to meet these demands. the rapid advancement of technology towards digitalization, the climate crisis and national interests added when the world faced the covid 19 pandemic where changes also had an impact on education. Higher education also follows the changes by transforming to face the demands of the industrial era 4.0, as education that spearheads producing human resources has a number of competencies to suit the needs of the times. Globalization requires education to develop competencies from graduates who have; knowledge, skills, and attitudes then develop into the competence of a country's human resources to have a widespread and responsible impact on the global social life order as a whole into a multidimensional construction (Martini et al., 2020). A number of abilities demanded in the industrial era 4.0, namely: graduates who have competitive and adaptive abilities, changes in the learning paradigm lead to Data, Technology and Human Literacy or what is known as the 4C term ability including: Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, Collaboration, until now the development towards the 5.0 era the expected ability of graduates has increased to 6C: Character, and Citizenship (Laila, 2021). This makes higher education institutions have to prepare for the demands of producing graduates with literacy skills with a new orientation in the form of data literacy, technology and human resources (Sabaruddin, 2023).

Efforts to fulfill a number of graduate abilities according to demands are not easy, aligning the needs of industry and the world of work in society on the competence of education graduates known as employability. Employability has become a worldwide concern today. It has become a major factor in determining the socio-economic strength of a nation because of its role in producing human resources. Higher education graduates can acquire technical knowledge and skills through their study programs at academic institutions. But just having technical knowledge and skills is not enough to get someone a job. The lack of necessary skills makes graduates unable to demonstrate the knowledge and competencies they have acquired once implemented in the world of work (Nirmala, 2018).

In Indonesia, the number of open unemployment according to data from the National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas) of the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the average number of open unemployment in Indonesia from 2020 to 2023 is a total of 8,788 million people where higher education graduates (University and Academic / Diploma) contribute to the unemployment rate of 1,036 million people. This situation is a challenge for higher education, especially as the spearhead in preparing human resources which will then have an impact on the economic and social sustainability of a country and can seek a match between the experience or educational process in the study program chosen by graduates with the work skills required by the industrial world and society.

This educational challenge is then answered through the transformation of education as an effort to prepare Indonesian human resources to adapt to global demands in line with the statement of the Minister of Education and Culture Research and Technology at the G20 meeting “Transforming Education through a breakthrough in Merdeka Belajar” (kemdikbud, 2022). According to Duderstadt (2003), transformation in the world of higher education as a social institution has a good enough capacity to always make changes until now (Siti Fitriana, 2019). In line with this, the objectives of higher education (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2003) play a strategic role in educating the nation's life, advancing science and technology by applying humanities values and civilization. Higher education is the highest level of education in the

process of taking education, mastering the field of science, developing soft skills and hard skills, and strengthening understanding is a challenge in itself to produce graduates as expected (Susilawati et al., 2022). The educational policy steps outlined in government regulations through Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020 are the implementation of an independent curriculum for independent campus learning. This alignment is an effort for higher education to transform to fulfill the employability of higher education graduates. The independent curriculum for independent campus learning (MBKM) is an educational policy implemented under the leadership of the minister of education and culture Nadiem Makarim as a step to provide freedom and autonomy to higher education institutions to carry out their management functions, free from bureaucracy, and students are given the freedom to choose their fields of interest (Hakim et al., 2020; Mariati, 2021; Waruwu et al., 2022; Ahmad, 2023; Ayu Miranda Limbong & Masduki Asbari, 2024). This curriculum thinking arises from the view that the current curriculum in the study program is less focused on preparing students to go directly to the wider community, the business world and the industrial world. Lecture materials tend to be oriented towards the study and understanding of theories, but less balanced with the application of practical logic that occurs in the field (Rahman, 2022).

The results of graduate qualifications are also influenced by a well-managed learning process supported by learning resources and infrastructure that support the lack of an entrepreneurial spirit improvement program for students (novialum, 2020). The MBKM curriculum opens opportunities for students to take part in learning activities outside the study program for 3 semesters or equivalent to 20-60 credits (Dirjendikti, 2020). It is hoped that the implementation of this curriculum can reduce the gap that has occurred between university graduates and the world of industry and the world of work. The lag in human resource qualifications is the responsibility not only of higher education institutions but also needs to be supported by government policies that regulate regulations and support through cooperation between industry and society in the role of the tri darma of higher education. This problem will be studied in depth about the Employability of higher education graduates and efforts to fulfill it with the implementation of the MBKM curriculum and its impact is expected to help reduce unemployment.

METHOD

The method used in this research is a literature study of previous studies from various journal articles, book sources collected through google scholar, newspaper articles, website sources that describe studies with keywords: Employability, graduate competence, MBKM curriculum. Then analyzed based on the division of problem identification, namely the concept of Employability of graduates and the Implementation of the MBKM Curriculum, these two things are then interconnected in an effort to improve Indonesia's human resources, especially in reducing open unemployment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Employability Lulusan

The definition of employability of graduates will lead to employability skills theory introduced by William Beveridge (1990) in his book entitled “Unemployment: a Problem of Industry” identifying the difference between someone who is employable and unemployable. It is argued that employability skills lead to the ability to identify workers according to needs, get a job easily, do a good job and create change (De grip, Van loo, Sanders, 2004; Robinson, 2000;

Brewer, 2013) cited in Ortiz, L., Mancini, F., Jacobetty, P., & Maina, M. (2021). The use of this term in several different countries is adjusted to the classification of understanding and studying according to the development needs of each country, as follows:

Table 1. Differences in the term Employability in several countries

Nama Negara	Istilah yang digunakan
Inggris (UK)	*Core Skills, Key Skills, Common Skills*
New Zealand	*Essential Skills*
Australia	*Key Competencies, Employability skills, Generic Skills*
Amerika (US)	*Basic Skills, Necessary Skills, Workplace Know-how*
Amerika Latin	*Key Competencies, Work Competencies*
Singapura	*Critical Enabling Skills*
Perancis	*Transferable Skills*
Komisi Eropa	*Key Competencies*
Jerman	*Key Qualifications*
Swiss	*Trans-disciplinary Goals*
Denmark	*Process Independent Qualifications*
ASEAN *(Assosiation of Southeast Asian Nations)*	*Employability skills*
OECD (*Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development)*	*Key Competencies*
ILO *(International Labour Organization)*	*Core Work Skills, Core Skills for Employability*
EFA-GMR *(Education for All Global Monitoring Report)*	*Transferable Skills*

Source: (Brewer, 2013)

According to Okolie (2019) graduate employability is the ability of higher education graduates with a number of expected competencies that can be absorbed by the industry according to their needs. It is explained in his research in developing countries that there is a gap until the perception arises that most higher education graduates in developing countries do not have the main skills needed by employers and therefore their graduates are unemployed. Another explanation of the definition of graduate employability is identified with various contexts according to the needs of the profession (Alrifai & Raju, 2019) outlining the definition of graduate employability from several analyzed articles in the following table:

Table 2. Definition of Employability

Reference	Definitions of the Employability
Hillage & Pollard (1998)	"Employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment."
Lefresne (1999)	"The probability, for a given group, at a given time, of finding a job or emerging from unemployment."
Harvey 2001	"Employability is the ability of the graduate to get a satisfying job."
Vander Heijaden(2005)	"The continuously fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of competencies."
Bernston sverke & Marklund (2006)	"human capital indicated by education, competence development and job tenure, has a positive relationship with perceived employability."
Berntson (2008)	"Employability refers to an individual's perception of his or her possibilities of getting new, equal, or better employment."

Examining this requires an understanding in higher education regarding the employability of graduates so that it can overcome the problem of graduates who cannot be absorbed by industry. Employability is a categorization that is identified according to the needs in the world of work, this is important not only to prepare the talents of individuals but also to support the competencies required by a profession and anticipate the intense competition among industries (Alrifai & Raju, 2019). So many graduates from higher education complete their education without the necessary skills, attitudes, and knowledge to enter the workforce successfully (Kaur & Singh, n.d., 2008; Abas & Imam, 2016; Siddiqui, 2019). Thus, the emergence of unemployment rates from higher education graduates contributes to the increase in unemployment. Often jobs are available, but these graduates do not have what it takes to get and keep a job.

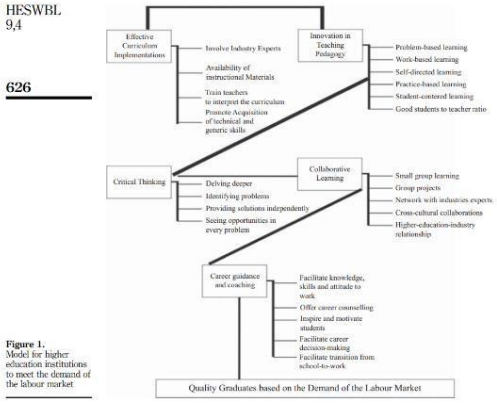
Formulating Employability of graduates in higher education

The era of the industrial revolution 4.0 is very influential in human life which is characterized by the rapid development of internet technology / Internet of things, including in the development of the world of education. The ability of graduates is prepared to be able to meet industry needs and the placement of graduates in a number of work professions.

Employability of graduates in higher education prepared to meet the demands of the 21st century industrial era has formulated several work abilities that are required to be mastered by higher education graduates, namely: 1) Technical skills, 2) self-development, 3) communication, 4) critical thinking, 5) ability to analyze and solve problems, 6) teamwork skills, 7) interpersonal skills, 8) self-management and organization (Wiele et al., 2015; Abas & Imam, 2016; (Nirmala, 2018; Siddiqui, 2019; (Alrifai & Raju, 2019) Okolie et al., 2019; Fajaryati & Akhyar, 2020).

Higher education is the highest level of education in the formal education level, graduates are required to master the field of knowledge, hard skills and soft skills that must be developed, and strengthening the understanding of the field of science and analytical and critical thinking. The qualifications of university graduates in Indonesia are prepared based on national standards of higher education based on the qualifications put forward in the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) policy. This policy is contained in Presidential Regulation no. 8 of 2012 which classifies 9 levels of qualifications of graduates from formal and non-formal education. This effort is made in achieving the desired quality of human resources. Government policy regulating graduate qualifications in higher education is structured so that it is expected to produce human resources that can be globally competitive and meet the demands of the industrial era. This policy is then outlined in Law No. 20 of 2003, Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020 and PP No.4 of 2022 explaining the National Higher Education Standards emphasizing on graduate competency standards (SKL) is the minimum criteria of several competencies that must be achieved by each learner in order to be declared a graduate at a certain level of education (Rahman, 2022).

The formulation in the SKL which contains a number of qualifications needed by the community must be planned and continues to develop in the form of graduate learning outcomes, which are summarized in the Curriculum, in determining Learning Outcomes, universities are given the freedom to develop according to the analysis of industry needs studies and pay attention to the content, process, and outcome standards of the National Higher Education Standards (Rahman, 2022). This is then the importance of universities measuring graduates by asking questions whether the ability of graduates is in accordance with the competencies formulated to industry and society as users of graduates, whether a number of competencies have been able to meet the needs of industry and society so as to reduce the gap between the two. The components that affect graduate qualifications, especially in developing countries, are illustrated in the following model (Okolie et al., 2019):



Gambar 1. Job Skills Model Job Skills Model ((Okolie et al., 2019)

In detail, it is explained in the model that the qualifications of graduates must be based on the needs of industry and society and can do the following: 1) Identify the Main Competencies needed according to Industry needs, 2) Developing a study program curriculum and choosing the right courses and not overlapping, 3) Technological Innovation in Teaching (Pedagogy), 4) The

teaching and learning process prioritizes implementation, critical thinking, and collaborative learning, 5) Career guidance and coaching for students before becoming graduates. The process of rapid societal change and national and global guidance through the role of the tri darma of higher education can result in answers to current and future human resource problems.

Implementation of MBKM Curriculum Policy in higher education

The problem of human resources, especially in preparing the workforce, is a problem in this country. As a step in answering these problems by striving for universities to produce graduates who can meet qualifications that adjust the needs of the 21st century era and future conditions. Graduates who are qualified, have character, and have the ability to face the challenges of the world of work. The Merdeka Campus Merdeka curriculum is a higher education policy as an effort to offer solutions to bring closer or reduce the gap between education and industry. The strategy in the MBKM curriculum of higher education can strive to be more precise and adaptable so that it can manage higher education institutions while cultivating student talents according to the demands of society and preparing students for the world of work (Ahmad, 2023). Aligning the educational process with the needs of society, students are expected to have added value and be able to compete in overcoming future difficulties through close involvement between the university and the world of work as well as off-campus activities that add insight and experience to students.

Implementation in this curriculum students are given the opportunity to do activities outside the campus for 3 semesters or worth 20-60 credits. The forms of activities ranging from industrial internships, independent studies, real work lectures, humanitarian projects, independent entrepreneurs, teaching campuses, research, and student exchanges, are other forms of learning activities outside the study program that can be participated in by students and as an implementation of education in bringing students closer to the needs of society so as to create links and matches. This curriculum then needs to be managed properly by universities, so that the expectations and demands of the community for college graduates can be met. However, in its journey, it provides its own challenges for universities and study programs. Understanding in implementing MBKM learning activities has different interpretations in each higher education institution. The number of learning programs and activities that must be implemented immediately is one of the many challenges that must be overcome by the readiness of faculties and study programs in equalizing the attitude of running this curriculum. Another difficulty is building cooperation both with partners, namely industry and between universities in Indonesia (Hakim et al., 2020; Mariati, 2021; Ahmad, 2023). The difficulties faced through the realities and dynamics of the MBKM policy field offer challenges as well as opportunities to develop creativity, capacity, personality, and the needs and independence of students in seeking and finding knowledge collaborated in the tri darma activities of higher education. The results of these activities will then lead to a number of competencies that are expected to be possessed by graduates such as technical skills, developing social interactions, collaboration, self-management, accustomed to meeting performance demands, targets, and problem solving. MBKM curriculum as a strategy in improving the Employability of College Graduates Since the implementation of the MBKM curriculum in higher education, which has entered its fourth year, it has had an impact on improving the qualifications of human resources with industry needs. Universities can adjust the educational process through the experience and knowledge experienced by students in learning activities. Not only on the fulfillment of the workforce needed by industry and the world of work, experience to open up job opportunities can also be created early on. The openness of partners from industry and society should be utilized by

universities to determine the standard of the results of their educational process (Hakim et al., 2020). Static data related to the number of open unemployment in the data range 2020 to. 2023

No.	Pendidikan Tertinggi Yang Ditamatkan	2020	2021		2022		2023	
		Agustus	Februari	Agustus	Februari	Agustus	Februari	Agustus
1	Tidak/belum pernah se	31.379	20.461	23.905	24.852	15.206	42.436	29.148
2	Tidak/belum tamat SD	428.813	342.734	431.329	437.819	663.125	454.305	344.881
3	SD	1.410.537	1.219.494	1.393.492	1.230.914	1.274.153	1.218.926	979.668
4	SLTP	1.621.518	1.515.089	1.604.448	1.460.221	1.500.807	1.445.701	1.246.932
5	SLTA Umum/SMU	2.662.444	2.305.093	2.472.859	2.251.558	2.478.173	2.216.001	2.514.481
6	SLTA Kejuruan/SMK	2.326.599	2.089.137	2.111.338	1.876.661	1.661.492	1.666.493	1.780.095
7	Akademi/Diploma	305.261	254.457	216.024	235.359	159.490	191.681	171.897
8	Universitas	981.203	999.543	848.657	884.769	673.485	753.732	787.973
	Total	9.767.754	8.746.008	9.102.052	8.402.153	8.425.931	7.989.275	7.855.075

Source: BPS data, National Labor Force Survey (Sakernas)

Noting that the data was released after Covid 19 where the industrial world had difficulty in maintaining its business and industrial sustainability, it was seen that in the following year 2021 there was a decrease in the unemployment rate of college graduates (Academic & University) even though it was only a little around 10%, gradually decreasing until 2023. Then this makes new hope for universities to implement this policy because it has a gradual impact on efforts to meet the needs of graduate abilities. What is needed from the implementation of this curriculum policy is inseparable from quality assurance in higher education, which plays a role in formulating policies, establishing quality guidelines, and carrying out monitoring and evaluation including assessment principles, established standards, aspects of assessment and assessment procedures (Sopiansyah et al., 2022).

MBKM learning activities carried out by universities, in this case the study program, as an effort to formulate graduate employability as follows:

Industrial Internship ; activities that provide real experience from a professional work environment. Universities become talent management that prepares students as participants in this activity. The application of the curriculum implemented in this program is the *Project Base learning* method because the fields of work are not the same and bringing students closer to the real components makes theory and practice in a learning condition. The program led by the Ministry of Education and Culture in the MSIB program until 2024 has been attended by around 150,000 students from 700 universities. The benefits obtained by universities can develop knowledge, attitudes and skills that are adjusted to industry needs. Given that the digital era has now begun, some jobs have been replaced and raised the need for *hard and soft skills* from graduates who will create new jobs in the industrial world. Meanwhile, the benefits for industry partners are building opportunities for cooperation with universities in various regions, honing the skills of the workforce, conducting early recruitment of students who may emerge new talents. (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021).

Independent Study: is a learning program provided to students to learn specific competencies and direct practice from experts for 1 semester. Including non-degree learning programs organized by organizations or industries that provide knowledge and skills with a high level of relevance in the world of work and the business world in the form of*short courses*,*bootcamps*, *massive open online courses* (MOOC), and others, followed by collaborative activities with both fellow participants and partner organization personnel in a project or case study (kemdikbud independent campus). Participating in this learning activity is expected that students can learn specific, practical, and needed competencies in the future, can interact with experts to understand their application, practice these competencies in a real project. The

implementation of this program begins with students being given relevant learning modules with the guidance of professional mentors. The learning method is carried out synchronously. The learning curriculum also includes the development of *soft skills* related to the field of science taught. In the final stage, students are given certification after passing the evaluation and have the opportunity to be given recommendations to companies or partner organizations from Independent Study providers.

Student Exchange; Activities carried out by students both between study programs at the same university and or different universities. The aim is to support the fulfillment of learning outcomes with courses contained in the study program curriculum structure and curriculum development to enrich graduate learning outcomes which can be in the form of elective courses. The objectives of Student exchange include: 1) Learning across study programs, providing students with insights into Unity in Diversity, fostering cross-cultural and ethnic brotherhood, 2) establishing friendships between students between study programs in different universities, regional differences, ethnicity, culture, and religion, which can increase national spirit. unity and integrity. 3) complete the process of transferring knowledge to cover differences in the implementation of higher education between study programs in the original university. and 4) improve the quality of graduates through academic mastery in the form of knowledge, technical skills, management skills, and communication. Students who have participated in this activity in 2023 have reached 24 thousand from 500 original universities and 228 recipient universities. The hope of this activity is that students are given broad rights and opportunities to gain knowledge with a new ecosystem within the scope of the university of the student's choice throughout Indonesia (Nizam, 2023).

Teaching Campus: is a learning activity by providing opportunities for students to study off campus for one semester in order to improve their ability to solve complex problems by becoming teacher partners to innovate in learning, developing strategies, and learning models that are creative, innovative, and fun. Students not only in the education sector provide opportunities for students across other scientific disciplines to collaborate. The abilities expected from students carrying out this activity include; 1) students have the ability to develop and implement learning strategies in schools to be creative, innovative, and fun, 2) have experience on how to explore diverse programs, 3) improve leadership skills, problem solving, communication, analytical thinking, creativity, and innovation from experiences in schools, 4) provide experience and contribution of students who have a role as agents of change, especially in education in Indonesia, 5) increase the network of friends for students with other fellow students and educators at school placement locations. Until 2023 this activity has been attended by 43,366 students from 853 universities spread across 38 provinces and among them 1071 came from vocational education diploma programs (Kemendikbud, 2033).

Thematic Real Work Lecture: This learning activity carried out independently by universities is a form of learning that can provide direct learning experience for students to socialize in the community. This activity can improve students' ability to identify the potential and needs that exist with the community and deal with their problems and is expected to develop the potential of the village / region (Mariati, 2021). As for the abilities that students are expected to have in participating in this learning, they can implement the utilization of their knowledge, technology, and skills, hone their abilities in planning, implementing, and evaluating programs in the community. This activity is an effort to help accelerate development in the village and students play a role in collaboration with many stakeholders in the region and the community, especially in providing education to the community and solving social problems in the community.

Entrepreneurship: this activity is an effort to support the government to fulfill the creation of entrepreneurs from students in Indonesia. The purpose of this activity is to improve the ability of basic competencies in the field of entrepreneurship and employability for students. Hopefully it can be a catalyst for interest and enthusiasm for entrepreneurship, with entrepreneurial experience. Increase the capacity and qualifications of students with the implementation of their knowledge in entrepreneurship. This activity in 2023 has been attended by 38,871 students from 479 universities (kemendikbud, 2023) with the implementation of this activity, it is hoped that universities will be able to carry out various studies, innovations and creativity in developing student entrepreneurship so as to help new entrepreneurs in the future who can open new jobs in Indonesia.

Humanitarian Project: This learning activity increases the role of universities in solving social problems such as natural disasters, social conflicts, and customary problems. Partnerships with the government, social institutions and communities in dealing with social problems. The vast territory of Indonesia and the contours of the region in a circle of mountains and oceans provide opportunities for possible natural disasters. This activity can anticipate and help the community overcome this. This activity is carried out independently by universities by collaborating with stakeholder partners and related institutions with the aim of preparing students with the scientific competencies they have and upholding humanitarian values to carry out humanitarian tasks, as well as training students, especially those with social sensitivity in identifying social problems and contributing to solving problems in society (Mariati, 2021; kemendikbud, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Universities are educational institutions that form human resources that have an impact on national and global economic progress. Higher education is the highest level of education in the process of taking education. It provides mastery of the field of science, development of soft skills and hard skills that are expected to produce graduates with a number of qualifications needed in the 21st century era. Matching the needs of industry and the world of work with the competencies of graduates-known as graduate employability-is a difficult challenge. It is said that employability makes it possible to find employees who fit the needs, get a job easily, do a good job, and bring about change. The implementation of a free-study curriculum on campus is an educational policy measure stipulated in government regulation number 3 of 2020.

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