
The Impacts of the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* Program on Students' Academic Performance

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Abstract

This research aimed to determine what factors affect the academic side of students during the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM) activities. It focused on the positive and negative academic effects experienced by English language education students at Universitas Jambi following the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program, especially for batches 1, 2, and 3 of the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM) program. The researchers used a qualitative method to reveal the effect of the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM) program on English study program students' academic performance. This research was conducted in the English study program at Universitas Jambi with ten participants. The data of this research were collected using interviews and documentation. The interviews contained experiences from the academic side of students based on interview questions. The results of the data analysis found a positive and negative effect on student academic achievement after participating in *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM) activities and the reason they follow this program.

Keywords

Academic performance, effect, *Kampus Merdeka*, *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM), student exchange

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Introduction

The Ministry of Education and Culture of Technology Research, which plays a role in this field, has introduced various programs and performance results. From the beginning until now, *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* activities have nine exciting programs that can be followed by students throughout Indonesia, including (1) *Magang Bersertifikat*, (2) *Studi Independen*, (3) *Kampus Mengajar (KM)*, (4) Indonesia International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), (5) *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)*, (6) *Membangun Desa (KKN Tematik)*, (7) *Proyek Kemanusiaan*, (8) *Riset atau Penelitian*, and (9) *Wirasaba*. The government encourages students to master any sciences to prepare for entering the world of work by launching the *MBKM* program (Krishnapatria, 2021). *MBKM* program allows students to seek experience and learn outside their home study program (Pongsapan et al., 2024). Nadiem Makariem, Minister of Education of Indonesia, created a step from this statement by triggering the *MBKM* program in the hope of improving the quality of learning so that it can provide the development of thinking abilities and response both inside and outside the classroom (Tabroni & Nurarita, 2021).

Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM) is one of the activities of the *Kampus Mengajar (KM)* program. The *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program is an activity of exchanging students from one cluster to another for one semester. The *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program has several goals and targets for students from the academic side that are expected during and when completing the program. As stated in the standard operational book (POB) of the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program, in point 5, namely "improving the quality of higher education through strengthening the comparative advantages (academic excellence) of each university," students, universities, and organizers have become subjects involved in the implementation of this goal. With this point, students will directly or indirectly receive positive and negative effects on their academic side.

This research has three research questions: 1) What is the student's reason for participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program? 2) What is the positive effect on students' academic side when participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program? Moreover, 3) What is the negative impact on students' academic side when participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program? These three questions are the primary reference for researchers in discussing the impact of students' academic side after participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program.

This research aimed to determine what factors affect the academic side of students during *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* activities. In addition, research was also conducted to assess how much influence students experience on academic performance when participating in this program. By looking at the factors that affect the academic side of students, researchers can see whether the program has achieved its goals: improving national insight, integrity, solidarity, and racial weakness among students throughout Indonesia through intercultural learning.

Based on several related studies that discuss the academic side of students against positive and negative factors, there are similarities in how the data in this research is descriptive

and qualitative. Some studies use quantitative research methods. However, there is a slight difference where previous studies used quantitative methods to analyze data in numbers. Instead, the researchers conducted research in a qualitative method, focusing on knowing the impact of the academic side experienced by students, both positive and negative aspects. In the previous study, most researchers only took a sample of students who participated in activities in 1 batch. However, in this research, researchers took data from three batches of activities that have been taking place. This reason could be a new thing for the researchers because the data quality was spread evenly from the initial batch to the end of each student who attended the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program. Exciting findings such as decreased GPA experienced by students are things that researchers have never found in previous studies.

Literature Review

Academic performance is believed to possess an amorphous nature since it broadly incorporates various factors ranging from attaining a professional degree to developing students in the moral sense (York et al., 2019). Giving a comprehensive definition of the phrase is made more difficult by the fact that "academic performance" is perspective-oriented in nature. Completing courses and acquiring new information and abilities may define academic performance for some organizations. The critical component of education is student academic performance, which can be characterized as the knowledge acquired by the student that a teacher evaluates through grades and educational goals set by students and teachers to be attained over a predetermined period (Kpolovie et al., 2014), as well as one of the critical goals of education (Narad & Abdullah, 2016). Academic institutions' main goal is to help students achieve academic greatness by helping them display excellent academic performance (Adeyemo, 2001). For anyone concerned about education, academic success is also of utmost importance (Steinmayr et al., 2014).

In a challenging situation like this, a pattern of cooperation between universities in Indonesia is necessary to strengthen each other and improve competitiveness, both at the national and global levels. This cooperation is essential and key to improving and equalizing the quality of higher education in Indonesia. The educational cooperation will provide opportunities for National Higher Education to improve each other's quality, expand access, and strengthen the network between universities nationwide (Logli, 2016). The cooperation will have an impact on expanding the national vision for the academic community, especially students as the nation's younger generation, resource efficiency for learning and research, developing centers of excellence, improving quality standards among national universities, building collective capacity to improve the nation's competitiveness, and strengthening the role of universities as the glue of nationality. It will support the success of the effort to educate the life of the nation, which has been mandated in the law on the National Education System.

Kampus Merdeka (KM) is a policy of the Minister of Education and Culture that aims to encourage students to master various practical knowledge to enter the workforce (Mujiwati et al., 2023). *The Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program allows students to choose the courses they will take. Students have the opportunity for 1 (one) semester or equivalent to 20

credits of learning outside the study program at the same university and a maximum of two semesters or equivalent to 40 credits of learning in the same study program at different universities, learning in different study programs at different universities; and learning outside of college. Learning in the independent campus provides challenges and opportunities for the development of creativity, capacity, personality, and student needs, as well as developing independence in seeking and finding knowledge through reality and field dynamics, such as ability requirements, real problems, social interaction, collaboration, self-management, performance demands, targets, and achievements.

Methodology

The researchers used a qualitative method to reveal the effect of the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program on English department students' academic performance. This research used a phenomenological research approach to examine the topic thoroughly and gain a deep understanding. Phenomenological research is a qualitative approach focusing on an individual's subjective experience and perception of a particular phenomenon. It aims to understand a phenomenon's essence by exploring its participants' life experiences. Phenomenological research aims to uncover the essence of human shared experience and provide a detailed and in-depth picture of it (Creswell, 2009).

Research design, site, and participants

The researchers employed a qualitative research methodology to ascertain the impact of the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program on the academic achievement of English department students. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is a technique for examining and comprehending the viewpoints and experiences of people or groups about a social issue. Additionally, phenomenological research, grounded theory, ethnography, case studies, and narrative research are five categories of qualitative methodologies (Creswell, 2012). A phenomenological research approach was taken in this research to investigate and comprehend the subject thoroughly. A qualitative method that focuses on an individual's subjective experience and perception of a particular occurrence is called phenomenological research. It seeks to uncover a phenomenon's essence by delving into its participants' experiences.

This research was conducted at the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Jambi. Researchers chose the Universitas Jambi as a research site because of the ease of accessibility in obtaining data and the absence of barriers in determining the research subject. The research participants were several English Language Education students of Universitas Jambi who had attended the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* batch 1, 2, and 3 programs. Researchers used probability sampling techniques to determine the research participants.

To obtain data, the researchers used interviews and documentation as the primary research instruments for obtaining the information needed during the research. This research conducted interviews to gather information about the opinions, experiences, and personal

ideas of students majoring in English concerning the research—interviews conducted online. The researchers contacted participants via WhatsApp, and interviews were conducted using Zoom. The researchers conducted interviews online and indirectly to adjust to the schedule and activities of the research object. In addition, researchers can also store and record research data more efficiently. The data analysis technique is done by processing the results of interview transcripts, observation notes, and document reviews. The data were analyzed based on the interactive analysis model promoted by Miles and Huberman (1994) with three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

Data collection and analysis

The primary research instruments utilized by the researchers to gather the data for the study were interviews and documentation. Ten study participants were interviewed to collect enough data; however, the exact number of participants may vary. There are four subthemes, including a total of twenty interview questions. Indonesian was used during the interview procedure to enable research participants to select terminology and provide well-reasoned answers. Interviews with each study participant take about fifteen to twenty minutes on average. The time can change based on the participants' needs and schedule.

The data analysis technique is done by processing the results of interview transcripts, observation notes, and document reviews. Data analysis is based on the interactive analysis model promoted by Miles and Huberman (1994). After the interview, the researchers transcribed the entire data, performed data reduction, followed by a data display of each sub-theme, and ended with the conclusion.

Findings

This section includes the data gathered in this research, followed by a discussion about the data and the findings of this research. The following data are collected from the analysis of interview transcription. The researchers discussed the three research questions related to the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program's effect on English department students' academic performance.

Reasons for students to participate in the Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka program

Experience studying at different universities, based on the participants' reasons for participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program, most responded that they wanted to feel the learning atmosphere on different campuses. With only a few semesters of study experience on the home campus, seven out of ten participants hope to gain new knowledge and experience on the recipient campus. As stated by participant 1:

“The reason I want to join this PMM program is that I want to have the opportunity to study in different places where all students will not own this learning opportunity; in my opinion, we certainly need to study anywhere so that the knowledge we have can develop and increase, therefore with this program, I can feel that opportunity to be able to study on a different campus from my home campus.” (P1)

The desire to gain new experiences is why students choose to participate in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program. Learning experiences in different campus environments are a golden opportunity to explore diverse learning methods, be exposed to new perspectives, and experience different academic dynamics. The same thing is said by Participant 9.

“I joined this activity because I want to study outside my own campus...”.

Based on this, it can be concluded that students want to get knowledge, experience, and other new things that they have never felt on their home campus so that students can enrich their knowledge and open a wider window of understanding of how science is practiced in various contexts. Similar to what P7 stated

“Because I want to find new experiences, and I want to find out about the cultural differences in Indonesia, and I want to meet new friends from different regions, and I want to learn about new things, and I get much motivation from my other friends. At the same university, I think many of my friends are very interested in this activity, so they motivated me to join the PMM program”. (P7)

The drive for curiosity and the passion to explore new things are the primary triggers behind this choice, motivating students to go beyond conventional boundaries and explore profound experiences in the academic world.

Free program, another factor that is the main reason for students to participate in this program is the overall financing provided by the government so that students do not have to worry about financing to participate in this program. It makes students more confident and eager to enroll and follow the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program. According to P5

“Because the government entirely funds the financing during this program.” (P5)

Financing facilities provided by the government become a strong foundation for students who decide to join the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program. With the financing guarantee, students are not burdened with financial problems that are often an obstacle to being involved in learning opportunities at other campuses. The financing that also includes Modul Nusantara activities conducted by students once a week is also a motivation for students to get to know a new culture, P4 stated in the following utterances.

"The main thing that makes me want to participate in this PMM activity is the benefits of free walks that we get during the Nusantara module; not only the walks, but I also get much insight into the sub-modules, especially the Diversity sub. I became aware of the culture of a region, Saw, Learned, and even practiced directly. I believe joining this program will open the door to a better understanding of cultural diversity and improve personal skills. In addition, I believe that this program will enrich social knowledge, expand social networks, and help individuals develop independence and tolerance for differences". (P4)

With financial worries addressed, students can focus entirely on the learning experience they seek without the burden of stress related to living expenses, education, or travel. It gives a great sense of confidence and increases the zeal to enroll and engage in a *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program, allowing them to explore their academic potential without hindering financial barriers.

Expanding network, in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program, students will meet many other students from different regions, races, and religions. This difference is unique because students must adapt and tolerate each other. It became one of the motivations for the study participants, as stated by P5.

"My reason for participating in this activity is to add relationships and experience because relationships and experience cannot be bought. When there is an opportunity, then that is where I use the opportunity as best as possible to get valuable relationships and experiences". (P5)

Based on these opinions, the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program is a valuable opportunity for students to explore cultural differences and expand their relationship networks. This opportunity allows students to learn tolerance adaptation and gain valuable experience dealing with diversity. As noted by one of the study participants, the importance of relationships and invaluable experience is the primary motivation for taking advantage of the opportunities that exist in this program.

Positive effect on student's academic side when participating in the Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka program

Based on the results of interviews that the author has conducted with ten research participants, there is an increase in the academic side that they feel. The increase in the academic side of students can be seen clearly in the cumulative Achievement Index obtained by students, but it does not happen to the overall study participants. Most mentioned that they were satisfied with the increased GPA.

Increasing Grade Point Average, the participation of students in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program has brought about multifaceted positive impacts on their academic journey. Notably, there is a visible enhancement in their academic performance, reflected in an upsurge in their cumulative Achievement Index or GPA. This improvement underscores

the success of the program's lecture activities in positively influencing students' academic development, as testified by their testimonials. As said by P9, she said:

“For the GPA itself, I got a very significant increase because for the duration of this program, at the end of the program, I got an IP of 4, and that means when in how many courses, in all classes, I got a very significant increase from my previous GPA. Yes, this is very helpful in improving my own GPA”. (P9)

With this increase, the lecture activities during the program were successful and positively impacted the academic side. It is also experienced by P10.

“Yes, there is an improvement on my GPA side”. (P10)

The increase in GPA itself proves an increase in students' academic side. Indeed, this cannot guarantee that students will succeed or not in undergoing all *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* activities. However, as students, they will always pay attention to this because it will significantly affect the final grade that will be given when the activity ends.

Improving skills and abilities, the next aspect can be seen in the skills and abilities that students have increased. The existence of several new courses and the differences in the scope of their study program give students new abilities and skills to adapt to different academic environments. These skills and abilities will undoubtedly be beneficial for students at a later stage. As said by P1, she said:

“The academic ability that I feel has increased from my previous ability is writing and speaking skills, where when participating in this program, I took one course, namely content writing, where in this course, at every meeting, we are obliged to produce one writing that will be assessed. Moreover, through this class, I have one site where I can share the results of my writing and be seen by everyone”. (P1)

The increased insight is also one of the positive impacts felt by students during this activity. There must be a balance between the academic and diverse aspects that are never missed during the program, but some students can balance the two very well. As said by participant 7

“For academic ability during this program, it may be more about public speaking, interacting, and learning new things.”

Thus, in this program, students experience improved academic skills and adaptation thanks to differences in academic environments. They acquire new skills, such as writing and speaking, through different courses in the program. The study participants showed that this experience also increased their insight. The balance between academics and cultural diversity is critical, although some students cope well with both.

Enriching insights, additionally, the program has catalyzed enriched insights, exposing participants to diverse cultures and a spectrum of new knowledge. The engagement in courses not previously encountered has broadened their academic horizons while fostering a deeper understanding of cultural diversity within Indonesia. With the conversion of courses conducted by participants before participating in *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* activities, there will undoubtedly be many new insights they get on the destination campus. Its many variations of courses offered can be a means for participants to receive many insights that they have never gained before as Participant 7 said,

"For an increase in insight, because here we join from all Indonesian students joining one university on different islands, of course, there is an increased cultural insight, such as learning new things."

Based on the participants' experience, she can gain insights not only in the academic field but also by getting to know new cultures and other things. It was also presented by P9.

"... for the program itself, yes, it was clear because I took courses at the University, of course, it would increase my insight, and I would certainly get new knowledge, and also if for diversity, the PMM program itself has one specific course specifically to add insight in the diversity section, namely the Nusantara module ...". (P9)

Based on this, participation in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program opens vast opportunities for participants to gain broad and deep insights. Previous course conversions broaden their horizons at the destination campus with various course offerings. Participants stated that this experience enhanced their academic insight and enriched their understanding of new cultures and other things they had never encountered. The collaboration of Indonesian students from various islands enriches cultural perspectives, creating an environment that supports the exchange of knowledge and experience. In addition, special courses in this program, such as the *Modul Nusantara*, add a unique dimension to deepening understanding of diversity, providing a solid foundation for increasing participants' insight and knowledge.

Negative impact on student's academic side when participating in the Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka program

Decreased grade point average, the researchers also found the negative impact felt by students. It is because there are differences in the lecture system, the way lecturers deliver material, and the frequency of assignments, which are some factors that negatively impact student academic achievement. As P5 said, she said:

"For my own GPA, I did not improve". (P5)

Although the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program offers valuable experience, not all participants get solutions to their problems during its implementation. Although some managed to become selected and better known during the role performance, not all participants saw improvements in their academic achievement. Some of them are unable to improve their performance index (GPA). Although there are efforts to bring a sense of friendship from fellow class participants from various campuses, there still need to be solvable challenges in solving the problems faced by some students in this program.

Lack of advancement in skill and abilities, the decline in ability and skills in participating in *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* activities can occur due to several factors. First, different learning environments and unfamiliar curricula can pose student adaptation challenges. Skills previously well-homed in the home campus environment may be less optimal when applied in a new environment. In addition, different social and cultural pressures, including different languages and ways of learning, can be obstacles to maintaining or improving academic skills. Sometimes, these constraints can affect students' motivation and confidence, affecting their skill improvement. It is a real challenge to undergo a *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program, which requires support, adaptability, and time to adapt so that students can reach their maximum academic potential. According to P5

"On the academic side, so long as I participated in the free student exchange, I felt initially that I did not know it would be like this on the campus; it turned out that after living there, it could be said to be much different from the learning process that I felt on my home campus. For example, if on the original campus, it can be said that lecturers who do not enter then do not leave the task. At the same time, on the destination campus, I often do not have classes arrive, and if there are no classes, sometimes there are tasks, sometimes do not. The task is in one semester, and I follow very rarely. At most, there is only one course of five tasks in one semester, and that is just answering the question from the eBook, so because of that, the eBook continues to be answered, and usually, on the original campus, it is always fed a lot of tasks, for example, in a week there are six courses, every time you finish college, you always receive assignments and the assignments are collected before the next meeting, the next week is also like that. So on, so there it feels like if you are on campus, you will be fed a meal in a bribe". (P5)

The experience of one of the participants in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program underlines the significant difference in the learning process between the home campus and the destination campus. These differences include the frequency of lecturer attendance, assignments, and different learning patterns. Participants were surprised by the difference in a more relaxed learning style at the destination campus when participating in this program. There, the lower frequency of lecturers' attendance and the smaller number of assignments led to the feeling that the learning process needed to be more intensive than its home campus environment. It creates the impression that the destination campus provides a less challenging and immersive learning experience. These differences reflect a real adaptation challenge for students enrolled in *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* programs, where differences in

teaching methods and educational governance between campuses can impact the decrease in learning intensity felt by program participants.

Discussion

The research aimed to explore students' reasons for participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program and evaluate the good and bad impact of the program on them. Findings revealed three primary motives behind students' participation: the desire for diverse learning experiences at different universities, the opportunity to forge relationships with peers across Indonesia, and the program's fee-free nature. The finding aligns with the predictions made by Herzberg's Theory (Prihartanta, 2015), which states that intrinsic factors possessed by an individual can motivate someone to work towards achieving satisfaction. Visiting other provinces becomes a source of satisfaction for students. It is the main reason for them to participate in the program *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* (Anwar, 2022). Aside from that, the strong inclination toward diverse learning experiences reflects students' aspirations to broaden their horizons, aligning with the view that exposure to varied academic environments plays a pivotal role in their development. Moreover, the program's social aspect facilitates connections and cultural exchange, while its cost-free nature fosters an environment conducive to exploration and personal growth. These findings relate to Anwar (2022) and Insani et al. (2021). The studies reveal that the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program is viewed as a means of developing and increasing innovative learning culture through collaboration, increasing diversity and tolerance, and adding relationships.

Positive impacts on academic achievement were evident, primarily seen in enhanced adaptation skills gained through exposure to diverse curricula and learning environments. It aligns with the concept of Quality Assurance in higher education, shaping students into qualified graduates aligned with industry needs. Interactions with culturally diverse peers facilitated deeper understanding and critical thinking, enriching students' academic commitment and motivation. However, negative impacts surfaced, including declines in GPA and a lack of skill development. Challenges, such as lecture ineffectiveness, passive classroom atmospheres, and differences in teaching styles affected students' academic growth. Such obstacles highlighted the need for more adaptive teaching methods and comprehensive program management to maximize student potential and mitigate adverse impacts.

The research insights provide a nuanced view of the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program's influence, revealing both positive and negative facets. Meanwhile, students benefit from diverse experiences and enriched perspectives, and challenges adapting to varied learning environments pose hurdles. Addressing these challenges demands a holistic approach, emphasizing adaptive teaching techniques and supportive program management to optimize the program's potential benefits while minimizing adverse impacts on student academic achievement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the research highlights the positive and negative impacts on students' academic achievement after participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program. The positive effects encompass increased GPA, enhanced skills, abilities, and insights from diverse learning experiences. Conversely, the negative impacts encompass decreased GPA and a perceived decline in skills and abilities. Reasons for participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program primarily revolve around students' desires to explore different campuses, the allure of a fee-free program, and the opportunity to forge connections nationwide.

Moving forward, several suggestions emerge from these findings. Prospective participants should conduct thorough research on the program, explicitly examining course conversions at receiving campuses to ensure a smoother transition. Deepening research before choosing the program's destination can aid students in understanding the learning system and potential academic challenges they might encounter. Future research focusing on academic achievement within *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* participants should seek diverse data sources to understand factors influencing success comprehensively. Lastly, while acknowledging the challenges of studying away from the main campus, students should remain proactive, striving to balance *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* participation while meeting graduation requirements confidently. Overall, this research offers insights that can guide prospective *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* participants and future researchers, emphasizing the importance of informed decisions, comprehensive research, and proactive approaches to optimize the academic benefits and mitigate challenges associated with the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (PMM)* program.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest.

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