

## **Prospects And Challenges Of Implementation Of Independent Learning-Independent Campus In Higher Education During The Covid-19 Pandemic**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the prospects and challenges for higher education in implementing the concept of independent learning implemented by the government during the Covid-19 pandemic in Indonesia. The Indonesian government responded to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, one of which was by implementing a policy of freedom of learning, better known as the concept of Merdeka Learning. This research is library research. This type of research is qualitative. Data were collected from primary and secondary documents. The approach used is the policy implementation approach which includes monitoring and evaluation. The theory used to analyze is the classical implementation theory which holds that the implementation of a policy runs linearly from public policy, implementers, and public policy performance. The findings of this study are: first, the implementation of independent learning is not measurable, giving rise to a variety of

interpretations among implementing agents; second, the main obstacle to the implementation of independent learning is the lack of support from human resources, both human resources and non-human resources; and third, low coordination between agencies. The findings in this study contribute to the study of public policy disciplines, especially related to criticism of the process of implementing independent learning in a campus environment that applies the concept of an independent campus. low coordination between agencies. The findings in this study contribute to the study of public policy disciplines, especially related to criticism of the process of implementing independent learning in a campus environment that applies the concept of an independent campus. low coordination between agencies. The findings in this study contribute to the study of public policy disciplines, especially related to criticism of the process of implementing independent learning in a campus environment that applies the concept of an independent campus.

**Keywords:** implementation, independent learning-independent campus, prospects and challenges

## 1. Introduction

The Corona Viruz Disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic is a social event that has no precedent, especially in Indonesia (Sarnoto & Hayatina, 2021), given the multidimensional impact it has, including on the world of education. Massive changes occurred in the world of education, such as closing classrooms, e-learning learning, and providing health facilities that were considered useful in preventing virus transmission in schools and higher education(Salehudin, 2020). In turn, higher education does not only organize online learning, but other Tridarma activities are also carried out virtually, such as virtual community service (Muttaqin & Sari, 2021). Previously, the learning process was still face-to-face and when students carried out Real Work Lecture (KKN) activities, they also met face-to-face with the community where they served.

The concept of Independent Learning provides space and opportunity for educational institutions to explore the potential of students as much as possible, by adjusting to the interests, talents, tendencies of each student. It is hoped that this independence and freedom of learning will be able to bring a positive contribution to the world of education and the progress of the nation

and state. One of the arguments that the learning model that took place during this pandemic is judged to be in accordance with the principle of "Freedom of Learning" is the demand for the world of education to adapt and adopt technological developments in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0. The rapid development of technology and information cannot be avoided by teachers, lecturers, or educators in general. The combination of learning methods and technology to help students / students is a basic need. For this reason, learning innovation in the 4.0 era has emphasized the mastery of completely new learning methods, demanding the maximization of potential, including mastery of technology in the learning process. This kind of thing can be witnessed directly in higher education which carries the concept of "Independent Campus" as an extension/implementation of the concept of "Freedom of Learning". At this "independent campus", higher education is required to be able to produce outputs / alumni who are able to have various kinds of knowledge and skills, so that students are not nervous to enter the world of work, are not inferior to machines, and are still able to control machines. This kind of thing can be witnessed directly in higher education which carries the concept of "Independent Campus" as an extension/implementation of the concept of "Freedom of Learning". At this "independent campus", higher education is required to be able to produce outputs / alumni who are able to have various kinds of knowledge and skills, so that students are not nervous to enter the world of work, are not inferior to machines, and are still able to control machines. This kind of thing can be witnessed directly in higher education which carries the concept of "Independent Campus" as an extension/implementation of the concept of "Freedom of Learning". At this "independent campus", higher education is required to be able to produce outputs / alumni who are able to have various kinds of knowledge and skills, so that students are not nervous to enter the world of work, are not inferior to machines, and are still able to control machines. This kind of thing can be witnessed directly in higher education which carries the concept of "Independent Campus" as an extension/implementation of the concept of "Freedom of Learning". At this "independent campus", higher education is required to be able to produce outputs / alumni who are able to have various kinds of knowledge and skills, so that students are not nervous to enter the world of work, are not inferior to machines, and are still able to control machines (Siregar et al., 2020).

Thus, Distance Learning (PPJ) conducted online/virtually is no longer merely a demand for worsening conditions due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Even if this pandemic can be assumed not to worsen the situation in Indonesia, the need for mastery of information technology in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0 is still needed. Learning methods in higher education are indeed required to adopt and adapt to the latest technological developments.

Moreover, the transmission of the COVID-19 pandemic requires social and physical distance, so PJJ is increasingly needed. For this reason, many parties argue that the use of the latest information technology in distance learning in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic has a very important role. and this on the other hand is considered to be able to support government policies that want to suppress the spread of the covid-19 virus. Some campuses have practiced the adoption of digital applications such as google class, whats app, zoom meeting, and others. The experience of some of these campuses shows that the learning process runs smoothly and well in the midst of a pandemic (Pakpahan & Fitriani, 2020).

The independent policy of learning from the government is not without problems. At the implementation stage, there were many unsolved obstacles. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religion received critical attention from observers, and were considered not to have taken into account the diverse characteristics of regions in Indonesia. Distance Learning (PJJ) which is expected to be realized by utilizing the latest technological developments is hampered by the low human resources of students. The students found it difficult to access education, the poor quality of the internet network, and the local government seemed slow in overcoming problems in their territory because they were still waiting for initiatives from the central government. In addition, with the Covid-19 pandemic (Azzahra, 2020). The aspect of infrastructure development that is not evenly distributed in all corners of the country is the strongest reason to see the weakness of the implementation of the concept of independent learning.

Not only experienced by students, but lecturers and students in higher education also experience the same obstacles. Ade Chita Putri Harapan, et al., showed the results of their research on 300 students as a sample. Statistical data on student stress levels can be stated as follows: 39 students (13%) had high levels of academic stress, 225 students (75%) had moderate levels of academic stress, and 36 students (12%) experienced low levels of stress (Harahap et al., 2020).

Thus, the implementation of the Independent Learning concept on campuses in Indonesia is not uniform. Some have been able to face changes due to the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but others have faced challenges and obstacles, both at the infrastructure and human resource levels. Meanwhile, the government is not optimal in providing the support needed

for the creation of equality between educational institutions. This does not only occur in the case of online learning with an e-learning system, but also involves various other important points in the concept of the Independent Learning Campus from the Government, for example the government does not provide a mechanism for collaboration between higher education and outside parties (service companies, industry, communities, other higher education, and government/private institutions)(Arifin & Muslim, 2020).

In general, the implementation of independent learning on independent campuses is neither uniform nor simple, especially for higher education that faces financial, infrastructure, geographical, administrative, human resources and other non-human resources constraints. This research is expected to contribute to the formulation of problems in the field and problem solving in the context of implementing the independent policy of learning from the government.

## **2. Methods**

This type of research is library research, which uses library sources to obtain primary data in this study. For this reason, the research data is limited to library collection materials, without the need for field research (Zed, 2008). Books, journals, magazines, and news content related to the implementation of the independent learning concept at an independent campus became the main information for analysis. In collecting, sorting, and analyzing library materials, the approach used in this research is the policy implementation approach, where implementation itself is one of the five stages of public policy, in addition to planning, formulating, leading, and controlling. Implementation is carried out after a plan has been prepared and formulated (Tilaar & Nugroho, 2012). For this reason, after the concept of independent learning was implemented into an independent campus practice, it was at that time that this research focused on its analysis.

Implementation theory is very diverse, one of which is the classical theory of the Van Meter and Van Horn models. This classic implementation model was introduced in 1975, which emphasizes implementation analysis that highlights six variables: first, the goals or targets of a policy must be clear so as not to cause a variety of interpretations that trigger conflicts among implementing agents; policies need to be supported by resources; communication between organizations and strengthening activities in various

cases; the characteristics of implementing agents must provide support for policy implementation, including how public opinion exists in the community; social conditions that support public implementation; and the disposition of the implementor must be maximal, both related to cognition, the intensity of the disposition, and the response of the implementor (Winarno, 2008).

Thus, the understanding of the implementation of independent learning in independent campuses in this study is about the comprehensive-holistic aspect of government policies when implemented by higher education, which involves: the extent to which implementors accept or reject the concept of independent learning, resource support from the government to implementors, communication between implementors and between implementers and the government, as well as the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic situation on the success or failure of implementing the concept of independent learning on campuses in Indonesia. In addition, in classical policy implementation theory, coordination between parties has received a lot of attention from experts and theorists. who considers that strengthening and expanding the network, both horizontally and vertically, is a determining factor in the policy implementation process. Michael Hill and Peter Hupe added that the implementation process must also be clever in redefining the vertical dimension(Hill & Hupe, 2014).

### **3. Results and discussion**

#### **a. Results**

In 2020, the Directorate General of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture published the "Free Guide to Learning-Independent Campus". The book is expected to be a guide for higher education in order to develop optimal, effective, efficient, and quality programs according to the National Higher Education Standards. All parties such as higher education leaders, lecturers, students, industry partners, and other related parties can benefit from this guidebook. However, the book is also called dynamic, in the sense that it can be changed, improved, updated, and updated according to the dynamics of needs and changing times. In general, after explaining the parties involved (Kemendikbud, 2020).

Several campuses have implemented the policy of independent learning-independent campuses, including: Tanjungpura University (Untan) as a State Higher Education in West Kalimantan (Ditjen. Dikti, 2021); Unity Institute of Business and Informatics (IBIK) Bogor (IBIK, 2021) ; Sebelas Maret University (UNS) Surakarta and Sanata Dharma University (USD) Yogyakarta (Kompas, 2021) ; Makassar public university (Agus & Asiah, 2021); UPN Veterans East Java (Puspitasari & Nugroho, 2021); Padjadjaran University Sumedang (Unpad, 2021); Malang State University (UNM, 2020); Persada Indonesia University Jakarta (Y.A.I., 2021); ATMA LUHUR Institute of Science and Business Bangka Belitung (Susilo, 2021); Medan State University (Unimed, 2021); Muhammadiyah University of Magelang and Ahmad Dahlan University of Yogyakarta (Adeed, 2021) ; Teuku Umar University Aceh (UTU, 2021); University of Indonesia (UI, 2020) ; Yogyakarta State University (UNY, 2021).

## 1.1 Discussion

First, about the Diversity of Interpretation. In implementation theory, according to Ade Risna Sari, policy standards and targets should not be blurred. Because, it will create multiple interpretations and easily lead to conflict between implementation agents (Sari, 2021). In fact, the implementation of the Independent Learning-Free Campus policy led to multiple interpretations that triggered the conflict. The first obstacle is the emergence of various interpretations of higher education on the points to be conveyed by the government. For example, Nadiem Makarim as Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology views that the right to study 3 semesters outside the study program is something that is easy to do. Nadiem Makarim said that if students want 100 percent to be in their original study program, that is their right. This is only an option for students who want to choose up to three semesters outside the study program. Furthermore, Nadiem explained the change in the definition of SKS which is no longer "study hours" but "activity hours", so that the types of activities that fall into the "activity hours" category include (Meilanova, 2020).

However, the simplistic way of Nadiem Makarim, as a representative of the government, cannot be understood by the implementers in the field, who are tasked with translating policies into practical actions. Lecturer of Communication Studies at Sultan Agung Tirtayasa University (Untirta), Mia 3349

Dwianna Widyaningtyas, said that based on her 1.5 years of experience translating the Merdeka Campus idea, she had difficulty converting courses according to the program the students were participating in. Mia gave an example of the Internship program, Teaching Campus, and Village Building. All of these programs can only happen if the courses match the Merdeka Campus program. On the other hand, if the course does not match the internship place, conversion of the course will be impossible (Riana, 2021). The problem raised by Nadiem Makarim's policy, as complained by Mia Dwianna Widyaningtyas, stems from the government's 'ambition' to conduct a link-and-match between universities and the industrial world. In fact, not all courses are in accordance with industrial-capitalist interests (Prabowo, 2021).

Nadiem Makarim's policy of wanting to make a link-and-match between higher education and the industrial world, which in turn was inserted into the vision of "Freedom of Learning-Independent Campus" also received sharp attention from education observers. For example, KH. Imam Jazuli said that the educational vision promoted by Nadiem Makarim was no longer in the context of national values as built by Ki Hajar Dewantara. The world of education is narrowed down to be in harmony with the interests of capitalist industry alone. In fact, the link-and-match principle in the world of education and industry is not in accordance with the socio-cultural aspects of the Indonesian nation (Jazuli, 2020). In other words, Mia Dwianna Widyaningtyas's view that it is difficult to convert courses into suitable internship programs is because the scientific disciplines that students are interested in are not fully what the industry needs, as stated by Imam Jazuli. There are disciplines that are of interest to students and become higher education courses but cannot be converted into internships in industry. However, knowledge that is not needed by the industrial world is needed by people who have a social-culture like the Indonesian people.

Another criticism and interpretation was conveyed by academician Luthfi T. Dzulfikar, alumni of Gadjah Mada University, Erasmus+Undergrad Exchange Program Carlos III University Madrid, who said that the Merdeka Campus policy package contained four points of change, including those related to accreditation and the opening of study programs. The new program, which is expected to bridge the gap between the university and the professional world, does not contain a clause that guarantees students' freedom of expression. In fact, according to Luthfi T. Dzulfikar, the latest



report from the LOKataru Foundation Legal Organization noted that since 2015 there have been 110 students who have received sanctions from the campus for being involved in demonstrations. Reflecting on his education at Wayne State University, United States(Dzulfikar, 2020).

The same thing was conveyed by Prof. Dr. Ir. Marsudi Wahyu Kisworo, IPU, from Pamulang University (Unpam). According to him, the concept of the Merdeka Campus is not independent, because there are too many binding government regulations. There are many demands and rules from this independent campus concept. Supposedly, the implementation of the "independent campus" is to give freedom to the campus to formulate a curriculum and students are given the freedom to determine their own learning. Likewise, accreditation does not have to be determined by the government, but is determined by the industry itself, because the essence of accreditation is the recognition of the industrial world. So far, education provided by higher education causes unemployment in Indonesia, because it is not in accordance with the needs of the community. Education in Indonesia is not independent because many courses are not in accordance with competence. According to him again, independent campus accreditation does not guarantee the quality of higher education and diplomas do not guarantee students' success(Unpam, 2020). Up to this point, the vision of a Free Learning-Independent Campus has not really created an understanding between the government and implementers in higher education or in the eyes of education practitioners.

Second, about the low support of resources from the government. In the theory of public policy implementation, the support of these resources greatly influences the successful implementation of a policy or program. However, in a state of limited resource support, the service will not run optimally(Sarnoto, 2013). In the context of the implementation of the Independent Learning-Independent Campus, another obstacle that also arises is the low support of resources from the government for higher education. So far, the Ministry of Education and Culture has collaborated with the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Center in Indonesia to support the Independent Learning-Independent Campus policy. One of them is making changes to the learning approach, from what was originally a "teaching base" to "students centers". Students and students become the center of attention and play a more active role, while teachers and lecturers act more as

facilitators and mediators. Other assistance and support include: strengthening program instructors/teachers, digital connectivity, world-class research collaboration (Kemendikbud, 2021).

However, the government support mentioned above is considered not optimal, for example due to administrative constraints. This can be seen from the case of disbursement of funds for funding facilities provided by the government for learning outside the campus, such as for students who do internships or take part in short course programs; to lecturers who enter the industry; or to practitioners who teach on campus. However, the disbursement of funds in 2021 is uneven due to administrative completeness constraints, and this disbursement will continue in 2022 (Warliani & Fauziyyah, 2020).

This suboptimal support is not only due to administrative completeness, but also to differences in access opportunities. The Coordinator of the Indonesian Education Monitoring Network (JPPI), Ubaid Matraji, said that the Free Learning-Free Campus policy was not in favor of the community and higher education, which had been constrained by access. On the other hand, the Merdeka Campus policy is very beneficial for campuses that have been doing well since then, and will become more commercial and more distant from the community after the Merdeka Campus policy is implemented. In addition, the criticisms conveyed by Ubaid Matraji are the same as those of KH. Imam Jazuli previously stated that if the campus continues to submit to industry, the campus will become capitalist agents who are far from humanitarian missions (Republika, 2020). Thus, the Independent Learning-Independent Campus policy will only create a gap between higher education; create social stratification, where campuses that have been good since everything will get better and campuses that have been constrained from access to power will still have access constraints. Meanwhile, at the same time, the better campus will be closer as agents of the capitalist-industrialists.

Third, after the low resource support from the government, either because of administrative problems or constraints on access to power, is a coordination obstacle. Policy implementation will be successful if the coordination is solid and strong (Sarnoto et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the implementation of independent learning-independent campuses is plagued by weak coordination as a determining factor for successful implementation.

This lack of coordination confirms the research findings of Syamsul Arifin and Moh. Muslim about small private higher education. Arifin and Muslim said that although the government should be appreciated for discussing the policy of opening new study programs, accreditation of higher education and study programs, at a practical level it raises big problems. Because, one of the conditions is collaboration between private higher education and external parties such as service companies, industry, communities, higher education and government agencies. This requirement is easy for large private higher education institutions, but difficult for small higher education institutions.

For this reason, in the context of implementing the Merdeka Campus, Small Private Higher Education is haunted by several questions that demand answers in the form of policies that are pro-public equally, namely about how small private universities cooperate with service companies and large industries, whether large private universities/PTNs willing to collaborate in all fields with small PTS/PTN, and whether higher education with A accreditation wants to collaborate with Higher Education with B/C accreditation (Arifin & Muslim, 2020). Or, in line with the criticism from the JPPI Coordinator, Ubaid Matraji, that the Merdeka Campus policy only favors some campuses. Of course, these concerns and criticisms are not contained in the government's policy on Independent Learning-Independent Campuses.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The implementation of independent learning on an independent campus has been running, leaving many challenges unsolved. The main crux of the challenge is social justice in the implementation process. An unavoidable fact is the difference in quality between higher education as implementers of government policies. Some campuses, especially large campuses, have the opportunity and opportunity to optimally and optimally implement the policy of “free learning-free campuses”, thanks to their extensive network, both between higher education and with the industrial world and government agencies. These same opportunities and opportunities are not owned by higher education which is of a small category. As a consequence, this effort to implement independent learning-independent campuses cannot be enjoyed by all groups. especially small higher education. From this social injustice,

various other obstacles emerged throughout the process of implementing the independent learning-campus independent policy.

In addition to the technical problems, there are also philosophical problems. The concept of Independent Learning-Independent Campus at the philosophical level is considered not holistic, even contrary to the spirit of independence. Some consider that the concept of independent learning does not contain a single clause that guarantees student freedom. Other parties consider that the concept of independent learning is even more demanding and implements rules so that the campus is not completely independent. Because of this philosophical constraint, the derivative is a technical constraint. Even a campus with an A accreditation does not guarantee the success of its graduates in the world of work, and higher education accreditation is not a guarantee needed by the industrial world. Even then, if the government wishes to apply the link-and-match concept between universities and industry. And while the government hopes that there is a connection between education and industry, another obstacle is the trapping of the capitalistic spirit, which capitalizes on the world of education and is considered not in harmony with the culture of the Indonesian people. In fact, on a practical level, it is difficult to convert certain courses to suit the needs of internships in certain companies.

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