Bridging Gaps in the Indonesian Emancipated Curriculum Policy: A Systematic Review of Lecturer and Student Challenges

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Abstrak

Pemerintah Indonesia baru-baru ini memperkenalkan Kurikulum Emansipasi yang dikenal sebagai Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) untuk menghasilkan lulusan perguruan tinggi yang lebih terbuka terhadap inovasi, mudah beradaptasi, dan siap menghadapi kebutuhan tenaga kerja modern. Hingga saat ini, sangat sedikit penelitian yang secara sistematis dan holistik menyelidikinya dari perspektif mahasiswa dan dosen. Dengan menggunakan tinjauan pustaka sistematis yang ketat, penelitian ini berupaya menyelidiki tantangan MBKM dari perspektif dosen dan mahasiswa. Sebanyak 25 artikel ilmiah diseleksi dengan cermat menghasilkan temuan tantangan implementasi MBKM. Dari sudut pandang mahasiswa, tantangan meliputi kurangnya keterlibatan kognitif, sulitnya adaptasi tempat kerja, infrastruktur fisik dan teknologi yang terbatas, dan kompleksitas praktik kurikulum. Mengenai tantangan dosen, analisis menunjukkan bahwa dosen belum terlalu memahami arah kebijakan MBKM, tantangan penyesuaian kurikulum, dan kekhawatiran tentang paradigma kurikulum. Tinjauan ini menyoroti perlunya pengembangan klinis MBKM dari pembuat kebijakan untuk mengatasi tantangan mahasiswa dan dosen. Artikel ini lebih lanjut membahas beberapa rekomendasi untuk penelitian selanjutnya.

Kata kunci: Kurikulum Emansipasi, Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka, Tantangan, Indonesia, Perguruan Tinggi

Abstract

The Indonesian government recently introduced the Emancipated Curriculum (EC), also known as Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM), aiming to produce university graduates who are innovative, adaptable, and well-prepared for the demands of the modern workforce. Despite its significant educational reform, limited research has systematically and comprehensively explored the curriculum's complexities. This study adopts a rigorous methodology guided by the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 framework to examine the challenges of EC from the perspectives of lecturers and students. A total of 25 carefully selected scholarly articles were analyzed, revealing key inductive themes. For students, challenges included limited cognitive engagement, difficulties in workplace adaptation, inadequate physical and technological infrastructure, and the complexities of curriculum implementation. For lecturers, issues involved unclear directions regarding EC, challenges in curriculum adjustment, and concerns over the curriculum's overarching paradigm. The findings underscore the urgent need for further developmental interventions to refine the emancipated curriculum and effectively address these challenges. Moreover, the study provides actionable recommendations for future research to enhance the curriculum's implementation and impact.

Keywords: Emancipated Curriculum, Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka, Challenges, Indonesia, Higher Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The unemployment rate in Indonesia is currently attracting attention from several stakeholders, especially academic communities, and both national and international mass media (Faturohman & Suherman, 2022; Febriyana et al., 2023). As of August 2023, the Indonesia Central Statistics Agency reported that the open unemployment rate was 5.32%, equivalent to around 7.86 million individuals. Out of this total, a substantial proportion comprised individuals who had completed a diploma or undergraduate degree, precisely 12.21% or approximately 960 thousand graduates. A significant obstacle college graduates face in securing employment is that they are believed to fail to meet industry demands. This is reflected in graduates' inadequate in proficiency, expertise, teamwork abilities, and adaptability. Furthermore, limited relationships between higher education institutions (HEIs)

and graduate users have been identified as noteworthy (Nieto-Márquez et al., 2020; Paramartha, 2016). The pivotal role of universities is crucial in addressing this issue.

The Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) has implemented a curriculum policy called *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) referring to an Emancipated Curriculum (EC) to assist universities in preparing graduates for the workforce. Overall, the policy seeks to grant HEIs independence through several initiatives, especially providing students with the "opportunity to study off-campus" for a maximum of three semesters (Dwyer & Walsh, 2020; Mohammadi et al., 2019). The off-campus activities include student exchange, entrepreneurship, teaching assistantship, research, humanitarian initiatives, entrepreneurial endeavors, independent study, and rural development. By engaging in the activities, students are prepared to have larger opportunities to develop their abilities by directly entering the workforce (Cole, 2018; Ntshwarang et al., 2021). According to its official release, EC has received a warm reception from the stakeholders. 1,300 HEIs have implemented the program, with a participation rate of 725,000 students. In addition, 14,000 elementary and secondary schools across Indonesia have documented the advantages of teaching support. Furthermore, over 3000 companies actively engage as partners.

Since its introduction in 2020, the EC policy has been the subject of numerous research studies examining the success of its implementation. These studies have focused on various stakeholders, including lecturers students, educational staff, and partners (Dhirapriyani et al., 2024; Dubicki, 2019). Although many studies have attempted to investigate EC practices, most of these are limited to particular sites and have a narrow focus. Typically, they concentrated on a solitary study context and were carried out within a concise duration. For instance, who focused on the viewpoints of students, lecturers, and staff, conducted the investigations at a single location of a higher education institution (Dubicki, 2019; Wiradinata & Antonio, 2019). These studies have limitations regarding their capacity to be applied to a broader range of situations (generalizability). Therefore, it is necessary to have a more in-depth debate about the findings and their implications in a broader context.

It is crucial to perform a comprehensive systematic literature review (SLR) to have a more thorough understanding of the difficulties encountered by stakeholders. SLR is a rigorous process that aims to gather, analyze, and evaluate all pertinent sources of information to provide comprehensive answers to the research questions (Asmi et al., 2022; Ifanov et al., 2023). Efficient SLR can establish a robust basis for developing knowledge, theories, and conceptual models. Based on our literature observation, it became evident that SLR studies examining the EC remain relatively scarce.

Neither other studies provided sufficient explicit details regarding the methodology employed for the SLR. For instance, while other study recognized the significance of literature reviews to study EC, they did not appear to have made a compelling effort to effectively minimize the impact of researchers' subjectivity, resulting in a noticeable research bias. Their explanations of the methodologies were inadequate and lacked clarity as they lacked adequate information on the database used, analysis procedures, and criteria for selecting eligible data, which are crucial components of conducting literature reviews. Against this backdrop, this study aimed to present a rigorous systematic literature review to address the following research questions.

2. METHODS

We offered a comprehensive and rigorous systematic literature review to gain a more thorough understanding of the difficulties encountered by students and lecturers in the Emancipated Curriculum implementation. SLR is employed to discover, combine, and evaluate pertinent sources to generate responses to research questions. Efficient SLR can establish a robust basis for developing knowledge, theories, and conceptual models (Triandini

et al., 2019). Through a rigorous analysis of various viewpoints, SLR can offer the most effective answers to research issues compared to other research methodologies.

In this study, we followed the guidelines outlined in The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 statement (Page et al., 2021). Following our identification of the research goals, we proceeded with three meticulous steps of investigation, which encompassed 1) data collection, 2) screening for data eligibility, and 3) coding and analyzing the data. Figure 1 depicts the process for data collection and data eligibility assessment.
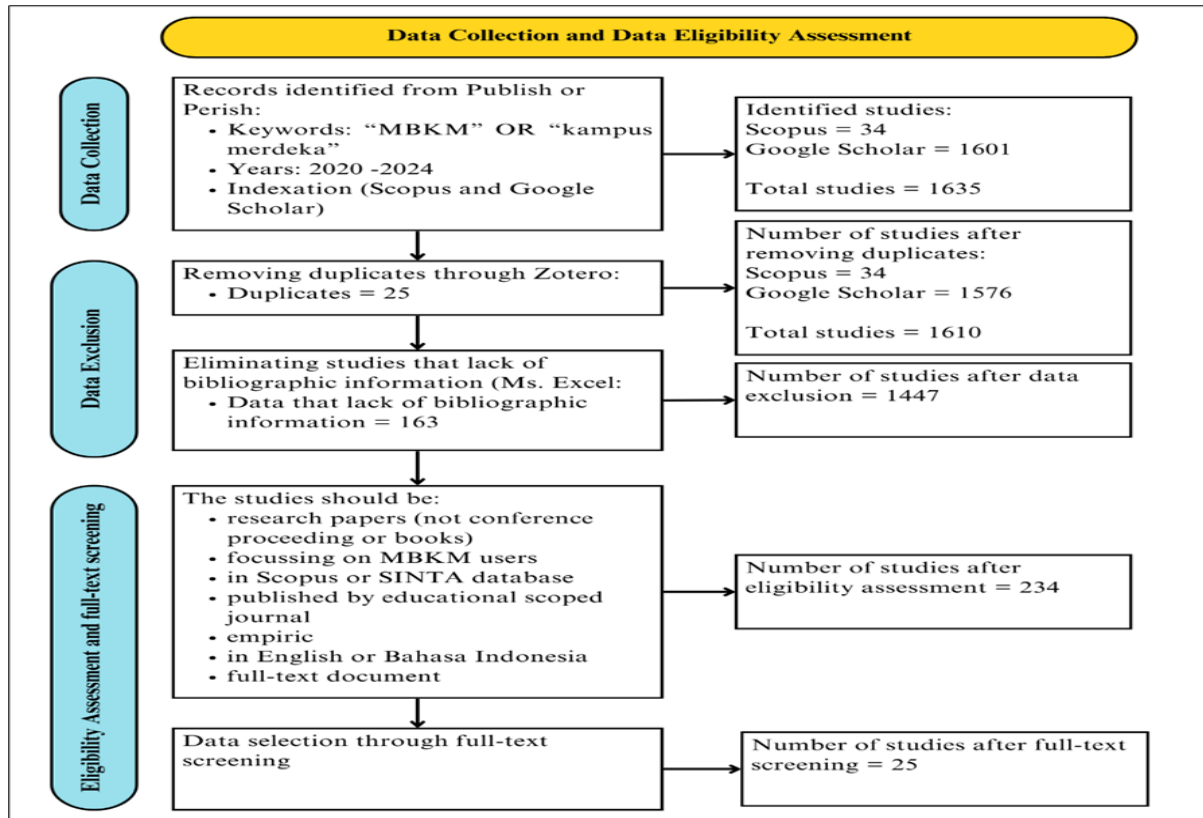

Figure 1. Systematic Literature Review Procedure

We were resolute in our decision to utilize papers obtained from the Scopus and Google Scholar databases. The Scopus database was selected because of its widespread recognition as the largest and most reputable scientific database. Additionally, we employed the Google Scholar database due to its increased availability of literature data and the fact that Indonesian researchers have more publications in this database. Data was gathered on March 2024. Using Publish or Perish 8.11 software; we utilized Boolean expressions to input keywords ("*MBKM*" or *Kampus Merdeka*") and limited the publication year to 2020 to 2024. Researcher conducted searches for section titles, abstracts, and keywords. The search results retrieved a cumulative of 34 publications from the Scopus database. The total number of articles collected from Google Scholar is 1601, with a maximum annual search count of 500 publications. In addition, 1635 publications were obtained from the Scopus and Google Scholar databases during the data collecting phase.

The data eligibility assessment yields primary publication data that will be evaluated. We utilized Karakuş's publication data screening method to assess the appropriateness or qualification of publication data. First, we prioritized scientific papers, excluding conferences, books, and book chapters. Secondly, the article must be published by reputable journals that employ a rigorous peer-review process. If a paper is not included in the Scopus

database, it must be published by a publication accredited by the Science and Technology Index (SINTA), a government scientific database. Thirdly, the paper must be published in journals with an educational or closely related focus. Fourthly, publications are required to present findings derived from empirical studies. Fifthly, articles must be written exclusively in either English or Indonesian. Lastly, the article must be full-text.

After carefully considering the criteria, we rigorously assessed the suitability of data by examining the titles, abstracts, article keywords, and journal website pages to see if they meet the requirements for indexation. 234 articles satisfied the established criteria. Subsequently, these articles proceeded to full-text screening. Full-text screening aimed to discover papers that specifically address the research questions. We allocated the tasks among all researchers. In addition, we extended invitations to a group of our students (n=6) to assist with the comprehensive evaluation. To ensure that students conduct full-text screening correctly, we gave them information regarding the research's objective, the purpose and process of full-text screening, and guidelines on reporting the outcomes using the provided format.

To address the two research questions, coding categories were developed through an inductive approach. The selected 25 articles were independently coded by all authors to resolve the two RQs. We conducted an open coding of the articles by analyzing the challenges encountered by students and lecturers during the implementation of EC. Additionally, we reviewed the manuscript with an emphasis on the discussion and limitation sections to extract data. Whenever the results were unclear, the authors convened to discuss them and decide by consensus.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Results are the main part of scientific articles, containing: final results without data analysis process, hypothesis testing results. Results can be presented with tables or graphs, to clarify the results verbally. This section reports on the research findings as the answer to the research questions. It discusses the challenges experienced by students, lecturers, and higher education institutions in achieving the goals of the Emancipated Curriculum. The inductive analysis discovered four challenges from the first research question (RQ1), and three challenges from RQ2. In addition, subcategories were unearthed to specify the challenges that emerged from the inductive analysis. Inductive categories and sub-categories of students' challenges is show in Table 1.

Table 1. Inductive Categories and Sub-Categories of Students' Challenges

Inductive Categories	Sub-categories	Sources
Lack of cognitive engagement	Insufficient knowledge of EC	(Budhi et al., 2022; Laga et al., 2021; Meke et al., 2022; Mursitama et al., 2022; Salim et al., 2022; Syuhada et al., 2024; Yuniati & Wilujeng, 2023; Zakiyyah et al., 2021)
	Unwillingness to participate	(Aprianti & Winarto, 2023; Hanapi et al., 2023; Meke et al., 2022; Syuhada et al., 2024; Yuniati & Wilujeng, 2023)
Unexpected reality of the workplaces	Students-partners disconnection	(Suastika et al., 2022; Supriyoko et al., 2022; Tuasikal et al., 2021)
	Internship adaptation challenges	(Asra et al., 2023)

Inductive Categories	Sub-categories	Sources
	Charged with additional cost	(Hatmanto et al., 2023)
	Insufficient period of Internship	(Lathifah et al., 2022; Tuasikal et al., 2021)
Poor physical and technological infrastructure	Inaccessibility of internship sites	(Anggara, 2023; Asra et al., 2023)
	Limited internet access	(Anggara, 2023; Asra et al., 2023)
	Poor Internship facilities	(Asra et al., 2023)
Complexity of the curriculum practice	The complexity of enrolment	(Hanapi et al., 2023; Syahruddin & Tambaip, 2023)
	Course schedule adjustments	(Supriyoko et al., 2022)

Insufficient knowledge of EC. The present study revealed that students' lack of cognitive engagement in EC has emerged as a significant challenge. Numerous analyzed datasets indicated a lack of adequate understanding of EC among students (Budhi et al., 2022; Chiu et al., 2023). The word "insufficient knowledge" in Table 1 does not just refer to students' awareness of the existence of the EC. Instead, it pertains to their level of comprehension of its intricacies, such as its regulations, duration, credit conversion (Budhi, and enrolment (Karakuş, 2021; Lathifah et al., 2022). Unwillingness to participate. Out of 25 papers, six reported that students expressed reluctance to join the EC programs. In these studies, students' unwillingness to participate is referred to as the issue of 'readiness', 'interest', and 'preparedness' (Aprianti & Winarto, 2023; Syuhada et al., 2024; Yuniati & Wilujeng, 2023). Several factors contributed to students' reluctance to participate were low self-confidence, financial concerns, inadequate academic support, and insufficient preparation (Meke et al., 2022; Suharno & Sudrajat, 2023).

Unexpected Reality from the Workplace

Students-partners disconnection. This condition was reflected by the limited guidance from partners and the lack of partners' preparation (Supriyoko et al., 2022; Tuasikal et al., 2021). Studies reported that students frequently experience disappointment when participating in teaching assistantship (Lestari et al., 2022). This occurred as the school teachers provided limited guidance. Teachers were often reported to let students practice teaching alone without receiving feedback. This created a sense that they merely replaced the role of the teachers. Besides, student interns were overburdened with teaching administration workload. A further observation found inadequate readiness of partners (Suastika et al., 2022; Supriyoko et al., 2022). A report revealed that students were in a state of shock upon first discovering that the internship institution had zero knowledge about the EC program taking place in their institution.

Adaptation challenges. The issue of adaptability poses a perennial challenge for students when going on work practice. In their investigation of the difficulties faced by student teachers during their teaching internships, previous study brought to light the student teachers' struggles with classroom management, particularly with controlling the disruptive behaviour of the pupils (Asra et al., 2023). It was said that such real-life classroom situation affects the well-being of the student teachers and eventually cause frustration and demotivation.

Charged with additional cost. MEC provides financial aid to students who undertake learning activities outside the study program. However, after it had been used to cover

students' living and housing expenses, this financial assistance was still insufficient. Consider the student exchange program, for example. As a department could offer its courses to other departments within or outside the university, they tended to "sell" the courses to generate revenue. According to a report, students were required to pay the target department for the department to provide several educational services (Mardiana & Amalia, 2022). Typically, the payments from students are utilized to cover the incentives for professionals from industries and lecturers to do lectures and seminars.

Insufficient period of Internship. As per the MEC guidelines, the internship program is conducted for a minimum duration of 1 semester, which is approximately 16 weeks. Nevertheless, in practical implementation, the programs were conducted in less time than stipulated by the guidelines. Previous study stated that the duration of the internship program in the form of teaching assistant was limited to a period of 8 weeks (Tuasikal et al., 2021). He additionally concluded that the internship programs were ineffectual and did not succeed in attaining their objective, which is to equip students with the necessary technical and interpersonal abilities demanded by the industry. In a similar vein, Lathifah et al. (2022) discovered that students' experience was limited as a result of their involvement in a brief internship period (Lathifah et al., 2022).

Poor Physical and Technological Infrastructure

Inaccessibility of internship sites. As the EC prioritizes remote areas to receive the program of teaching assistantship, it has sparked concern from students regarding the inaccessibility of the target school. According to study who investigated EC challenges from students' and teachers' perspectives in rural South Sulawesi, it would require three to four hours to reach the school (Asra et al., 2023). Another obstacle to reaching the schools is the unsatisfactory road conditions, particularly during the rainy season.

Limited internet access. Numerous schools located in remote areas continue to have challenges in obtaining sufficient internet connectivity (Anggara, 2023; Asra et al., 2023). This situation frequently hinders student interns from efficiently using technology-based teaching methods. Consequently, the student interns were unable to carry out asynchronous learning as a solution to the issues of schools' inaccessibility.

Poor Internship facilities. In addition to the challenges of accessing schools and limited internet connectivity, the focus was also on the condition of the school facilities where internships took place. These three issues appeared to consistently arise in concurrence with one another. The lack of classrooms, insufficient teaching materials, and limited learning resources provided significant obstacles for student interns in establishing a conducive teaching environment (Asra et al., 2023; Lestari et al., 2022). Ironically, such a poor school facility was reported to occur in Jakarta, the capital city and the most developed city in the country.

Complexity of the Curriculum Practice

The complexity of enrolment. If the target employer or other internship parties and study programs had not yet established collaboration, students were required to independently acquire their internship. They must consult their academic advisor, typically the program director, to verify if the internship program is eligible for credit conversion (Hanapi et al., 2023; Karakuş, 2021). Since a large number of lecturers were reported to have limited knowledge of credit conversion and students were given a relatively concise period of registration, these conditions may lead students to be demotivated.

Course schedule adjustments. Adjusting the schedule between off-campus and on-campus programs was believed to be an immense challenge encountered by students during EC implementation (Hanapi et al., 2023; Supriyoko et al., 2022). Students who enrol in the EC program are expected to fully devote their time to the program. A whole semester of the

EC off-campus study program is worth 20 credits, with one credit being worth 170 minutes each week. In case the semester is completed in 24 weeks or 81,600 minutes, the students will require 1360 hours to finish the internship. There was a case illustrated that it would be challenging for students when they have more than 20 credits to accomplish in a semester. Thus, they must complete the EC program and on-campus courses concurrently. Consequently, they must make sure that their internship and course schedules do not overlap. The challenges that lecturers experienced during the emancipated curriculum is show in Table 3.

Table 3. Inductive Categories and Sub-Categories of Lecturers' Challenges

Inductive Categories	Sub-categories	Sources
The unclarity of EC directions	Unavailability of the guidelines	(Anggara, 2023; Hanapi et al., 2023; Meke et al., 2022; Muhyiddin, 2023; Syahruddin & Tambaip, 2023)
	Lack of Policy Socialization	(Mursitama et al., 2022; Salim et al., 2022; Syahruddin & Tambaip, 2023)
Curriculum adjustment challenges	Curriculum preparation challenges	(Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024; Supriyoko et al., 2022)
	Limited collaboration with educational staff	(Mallett et al., 2012)
	Resistance to curriculum change	(Hanapi et al., 2023; Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024)
The concern about the curriculum paradigm	The absence of religious and moral values in the curriculum	(Hatmanto et al., 2023; Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024)
	EC overlaps the existing programs	(Hanapi et al., 2023; Syuhada et al., 2024)
	The gap between EC and actual learning outcomes	(Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024; Zakiyyah et al., 2021)

The Unclarity of EC Directions

Unavailability of the guidelines. While some studies indicated that several universities have established guidelines (Salim et al., 2022), many have not (Hanapi et al., 2023). A large number of the analyzed data raise the notions of the absence of guidelines. The absence of guidance might result in a sense of carelessness of lecturers. Also, this might lead to lecturers' confusion regarding some technical issues, including credit conversion, administrative forms, and funding disbursement (Supriyoko et al., 2022; Syahruddin & Tambaip, 2023).

Lack of Policy Socialization. The detailed information on the EC policies remains unclear to a significant number of lecturers (Mursitama et al., 2022; Syahruddin & Tambaip, 2023). A relatively large number of data (N=8) reported insufficient socialization received by lecturers. These studies unanimously called for more equitably and continuous socialization. For example, in his study examining students' perception of EC, a lecturer in an economics faculty, tried to juxtapose the socialization quantity and quality in his faculty and other faculties (Laga et al., 2021; Mursitama et al., 2022). The authors found that there was an imbalance in socialization as his faculty received far less socialization and training compared to other faculties.

Curriculum Adjustment Challenges

Curriculum preparation challenges. It is not an easy task for faculty members or head study programs to provide comprehensive guidelines covering all necessary aspects of EC (Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024; Supriyoko et al., 2022). Lecturers' tasks loaded with teaching instruments that need to be prepared before EC implementation, including assuring the learning outcomes are aligned with off-campus programs, collaborating with industry partners to design EC activities, developing courses that can be included in student exchange programs, and establishing a framework for evaluation. The lecturers' struggle in adapting, organizing, and performing the new curriculum, such a heavy workload might elicit a pessimistic response from the lecturers.

The collaboration challenges with educational staff. We must acknowledge that we found a lack of adequate data concerning the limited collaboration between lecturers and staff. Nevertheless, considering its importance, we must include this matter in our report. Previous study addressing the importance of collaboration between lecturer and staff (Bhakti et al., 2022; Setyanto et al., 2023). He realized that in student exchange programs, the administrative issues should be fully acknowledged. For instance, enrolling in other study programs leads to an increase in the number of students, not to mention these courses are also accessible to the public. Consequently, he suggested both lecture and academic staff must be educated and trained to anticipate a possible volatile classroom condition.

Resistance to curriculum change. It was reported that numerous lecturers were still believed to be resistant to change (Hanapi et al., 2023; Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024). Although they acknowledged the importance of EC, they tended to maintain the long-embedded routine which is conventional teaching and experienced a hard try to identify contemporary students' needs. In addition, while it requires time and effort to create or modify courses suitable for EC, they were already burdened with administrative, research, and teaching responsibilities.

The Concern about the Curriculum Paradigm

The absence of religious and moral values in the curriculum. The analysis showed several reports documented the lecturers' concerns as the latest curriculum does not sufficiently address the notions of religious and moral values (Hatmanto et al., 2023; Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024). A report documented that some educators recognized the absence of the 'word of the term religion' in the curriculum guidance. They have voiced concerns about the potential dilution of religious and moral teachings in favour of more secular and career-oriented subjects.

EC overlaps the existing programs. EC initiatives sometimes overlapped with existing study programs, leading to challenges that must be managed carefully (Hanapi et al., 2023; Syuhada et al., 2024). While numerous study programs already incorporate internships and community service, the EC may implement identical courses, resulting in duplication and ambiguity. Lecturers were reported perplexed as the existing programs, for example, teaching assistantships and company internships, entwined with the programs offered by EC.

The gap between EC and actual learning outcomes. EC's extensive range of programs may cause a discrepancy between the nature of these programs and the department's goal of producing graduates based on the predesigned learning outcomes (Hanapi et al., 2023; Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024). Lecturers often encountered puzzled situations in determining courses eligible for EC conversion, as not all EC programs align with the intended graduate profile. Furthermore, the integration of EC in educational study programs, concluded that the activities in EC do not adequately exemplify the personality attributes of a teacher, such as patience, courtesy, and prudence.

Discussion

Prior studies have noted the importance of identifying challenges during the implementation of *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM), an Emancipated

Curriculum (EC) that has been recently deployed in Indonesian higher education (Mursitama et al., 2022; Nafisah et al., 2023). However, the existing literature lacks generalizability and robust methodology (Bhakti et al., 2022; Pratama et al., 2023). The present study was designed to determine the challenges using a comprehensive and rigorous systematic literature review.

The data analysis conducted in this study revealed many critical issues. From students' perspectives, they intermittently experienced a lack of cognitive engagement, an unexpected work practice, poor technological and physical infrastructure, and the complexity of EC curriculum practice. Firstly, although students' lack of cognitive engagement toward EC has been greatly documented in the literature (Budhi et al., 2022; Meke et al., 2022), Developing students' cognitive engagement is important to foster a positive attitude toward EC. Therefore, both HEIs and lecturers are encouraged to assist students in seeing the value and relevance between their studies and EC programs (Supriyoko et al., 2022; Yuniati & Wilujeng, 2023). By establishing a connection between EC policy and students' personal lives and career aspirations, it is more likely to cultivate students' positive attitudes toward EC and maintain a commitment to achieving program goals.

Secondly, students participating in the EC were frequently unsuccessful in anticipating the real practice in the workplace. Confirming the previous studies, insufficient support from partners and the issue of adaptation became prominent under this theme (Lestari et al., 2022; Tuasikal et al., 2021). Nonetheless, internship environmental support may help students better understand their tasks, develop relevant skills, and reduce anxiety. Also, effective adaptation in internship programs is vital as it can greatly impact students' future employment opportunities, improving skills, and overall career success. To address this, universities and MEC must enhance their collaboration and engagement with the industry. In addition, there is a need for more active dissemination of information regarding the policy and details of EC to ensure that the industry comprehensively grasps its obligations and responsibilities. Other internship challenges that emerged from this inductive analysis are the issue of additional cost and the limited Internship duration (Hatmanto et al., 2023; Lathifah et al., 2022).

As part of student exchange programs, it was reported that students were frequently required to make payments to the target department to facilitate the engagement of industry professionals for teaching purposes. As has been earlier implied, additional costs could create financial barriers, making the program less accessible to students from lower-income backgrounds (Meke et al., 2022; Syuhada et al., 2024). Therefore, the department should be aware of this and foster an inclusive environment where every student, regardless of financial background, has the chance to participant. Regarding the limited internship duration, departments and lecturers have to reflect upon the EC guidelines postulating that the students must experience off-study programs for no less than one semester. They also need to realize that longer durations provide more opportunities for students to build meaningful skills and professional relationships, which are crucial for future job prospects.

Thirdly, the SLR found classic problems regarding poor physical and technological infrastructure (Anggara, 2023; Asra et al., 2023; Lestari et al., 2022). This challenge was frequently experienced by students who participated in the teaching assistantship. Inadequate physical infrastructure, including insufficient classrooms, laboratories, and study spaces, could impede the teaching process and have a detrimental effect on student interns. Additionally, the limited technological infrastructure, including outdated computers, inadequate internet connectivity, and a scarcity of contemporary instructional tools, hampers students' capacity to access crucial learning resources (Asra et al., 2023; Lestari et al., 2022). The primary objective of the EC is to offer an educational experience that brings about significant and positive changes. Thus, it is necessary to allocate resources toward the development of strong physical and technological infrastructure that can facilitate innovative

teaching approaches. This finding supports the idea of the government increasing investment in physical and technology infrastructure to create a favorable learning environment (Suharno & Sudrajat, 2023; Yuniati & Wilujeng, 2023). Furthermore, we promote collaborations with the private sector to facilitate the advancement of infrastructure and grant students the opportunity to utilize cutting-edge facilities.

Although it has been 4 years since 2020 when the EC was first introduced, the results showed that the complexity of curriculum practice has become an obvious challenge, including the complexity of enrolment and course schedule adjustments (Hanapi et al., 2023; Syahruddin & Tambaip, 2023). Students may be discouraged from applying due to the complexity of the enrolment process, which can be both intimidating and confusing. Furthermore, if the enrolment details are not appropriately communicated, students might encounter difficulties comprehending the steps and prerequisites, which may result in errors and delays (Meke et al., 2022). One potential implication of this is that the government and universities may simplify the process by providing a one-stop enrolment, allowing students to complete all required steps in a single session (Laga et al., 2021; Meke et al., 2022). This would reduce complexity and increase efficiency. Enrolment assistance can be provided to students through workshops, helpdesks, or peer support programs, which can help students navigate the process more easily (Suastika et al., 2022; Syahruddin & Tambaip, 2023). Regarding schedule issues, balancing on-campus courses with off-campus activities might lead to conflicting schedules, making it difficult for students to fulfil all their commitments. This was exacerbated when they received insufficient institutional support, leaving them to manage conflicts on their own which may increase their burden and stress. Universities are thus urged to consider flexible learning including online courses to provide students with greater control. Moreover, enhancing academic assistance and offering strong institutional support—including transportation services and resources—may help students easily manage their schedules.

The SLR has also shed light upon challenges lecturers face during EC implementation. The analysis resulted in three inductive categories, including the unclarity of EC directions, curriculum adjustment challenges, and the concern about the curriculum paradigm. Firstly, in addition to the guidelines provided by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the faculties and study programs are encouraged to develop their own official EC guidelines that are tailored to their specific environment and objectives. Once the guideline has been established, it must be shared with the parties involved, especially lecturers. However, this study found the unavailability of the EC guidelines in numerous HEIs (Anggara, 2023; Hanapi et al., 2023). Without clear guidelines, lecturers, as the students' supervisors, might struggle to understand the program's objectives, processes, and requirements, leading to confusion in the implementation and evaluation (Mursitama et al., 2022; Supriyoko et al., 2022). Thus, the universities and faculties should prioritize the development and dissemination of guidelines that cover all aspects of the EC. Also, they need to ensure the involvement of lecturers in the creation of guidelines to ensure they address the needs and challenges. Continuously reviewing and updating the guidelines would be crucial to reflect practices, feedback from participants, and lessons learned from EC implementation.

Secondly, the analysis delineated lecturers' challenges in adjusting the new curriculum. Under this theme are curriculum preparation challenges, limited collaboration with staff, and resistance to curriculum change (Hanapi et al., 2023; Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024). In preparation challenges, integrating the EC objectives with existing curricula can be complex and time-consuming, resulting in the struggle to align the course content with the EC goals. Also, developing new teaching materials and resources requires significant effort and time, which lecturers found challenging to manage alongside their regular duties. This increased workload can further lead lecturers to resistance to change (Mardiana & Amalia, 2022; Mursitama et al., 2022). With that being said, HEIs are addressed to provide

comprehensive training programs, including EC development and assessment. HEIs are also called to ensure the necessary administrative and logistical support to lecturers, especially in reducing bureaucratic barriers. Creating platforms for lecturers to share best practices is also suggested to boost the collaborative atmosphere and peer support. Limited collaboration with staff emerged as the challenge in the adjustment of the new curriculum. This may lead to misunderstandings in implementing the MBKM program. Without adequate communication, important information about the EC updates may not be effectively shared, leading to gaps in understanding and execution (Hatmanto et al., 2023; Laga et al., 2021). The departments are suggested to establish regular meeting forums for lecturers and staff to share information about the EC. In addition, they are encouraged to clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of lecturers and staff to avoid overlaps and gaps.

The challenges of the EC implementation also came from the lecturers' concern about the curriculum paradigm. The lecturers to some extent doubted the effectiveness of the EC as it lacks religious and moral values, overlaps with the existing programs, and differs in the predesigned learning outcomes (Xiao & Watson, 2019; Zakiyyah et al., 2021). Criticism emerged from the lecturers that the EC may overshadow the cultivation of religious and moral principles that are deeply ingrained in the Indonesian educational system (Hatmanto et al., 2023; Nurbani & Setiawan, 2024). While the program fosters creativity and innovation, it often overlooks the importance of developing individuals with strong religious and ethical principles. This can lead to an imbalance where students might excel technically but lack a moral and ethical compass. Policymakers and lecturers are recommended to consider the more pronounced role of religious education within the EC curriculum argued that incorporating religious values in EC can foster better character-building and moral development. In terms of overlapping with the existing programs, it can lead to redundancy and confusion among students and lecturers, potentially reducing the effectiveness of the EC. Therefore, the faculties and departments need to consider the refinement of curricula to incorporate more elective courses and flexible pathways that accommodate EC, ensuring that students benefit from a well-rounded educational experience (Hanapi et al., 2023; Nafisah et al., 2023). Related to the gap between EC and predesigned learning outcomes, departments may rearrange the learning outcomes to include broader competencies such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and adaptability, which can be achieved through EC (Muslihati et al., 2023; Yuniati & Wilujeng, 2023). Aligning learning outcomes with experiential learning can also be fruitful. For instance, an internship can be designed to meet specific learning outcomes related to practical skills and industry knowledge.

Although the study has successfully demonstrated systematic literature procedures to elicit EC challenges, certain limitations need to be acknowledged. Firstly, we realized that different search queries would yield diverse outcomes. We filtered articles using the terms "MBKM" or "Kampus Merdeka". This means that publications without these words in the title, abstract, and keywords were not included. Secondly, certain papers that failed to meet the criteria for eligibility may have presented an additional perspective but were not included in the analysis. Thirdly, as our focus is to investigate EC from the view of lecturers and students, industry partners' perspectives remain unclear. In terms of directions for future research, further work could consider using different keywords in the query string to have alternative literature publication results. They are also called to modify the eligible criteria, ensuring broader and all-compassing results. Another possible area of future research would be to investigate the implementation of EC according to industry partners.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to examine the challenges the students and lecturers commonly experienced during the implementation of the Emancipated Curriculum in

Indonesia's higher education. By employing a rigorous systematic literature review, several important student challenges were unearthed, including lack of cognitive engagement, unsuccessful adaptation in workplaces, poor physical and technological infrastructure, and complexity of the curriculum practice. From the view of lecturers, the major challenges include the unclarity of EC directions, the curriculum adjustment challenges, and the concern about the curriculum paradigm. These findings contribute in several ways to our understanding of the EC dynamics and provide a basis for its development. Firstly, the government and HEIs need to increase comprehensive awareness campaigns to educate both students and lecturers. Secondly, we encourage regular training sessions for lecturers to familiarize them with EC policies and how to implement them effectively, and guidance sessions for students on how to navigate and maximize the opportunities offered by EC. Thirdly, HEIs are encouraged to offer support for curriculum redesign to integrate EC and facilitate collaboration between faculty members to develop innovative teaching methods and course structures. Fourthly, HEIs provide adequate resources, such as advisory services to assist both lecturers and students, and administrative support to reduce bureaucratic barriers. Lastly, HEI's or faculties are called for establishing channels for continuous feedback from students and lecturers to identify challenges and areas for improvement.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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