

The Role of the *Studi Independen* Program in Enhancing Students' Job Readiness

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Article Information		Abstract
Submission date	January 3, 2025	Research aim : To evaluate the impact of the <i>Studi Independen</i> Program on students' skills and job readiness from the perspectives of students and business actors. Design/Method/Approach : Qualitative descriptive research with structured interviews. Informants were selected using the 4R technique. Research Finding : The <i>Studi Independen</i> Program enhances students' technical and interpersonal competencies, though there are shortcomings in advanced skill development and guidance for professional portfolio creation. Data analysis involved reduction, categorization, and triangulation to ensure validity. The research was conducted through online interviews and establishment in Kediri City. Theoretical contribution/Originality : Provides an evaluation of the program's impact from two perspectives. Practitioner/Policy implication : Offers insights to improve experiential learning programs in alignment with industry needs. Research limitation : Limited participant coverage and a qualitative approach may not fully reflect broader experiences. Keywords : <i>Studi Independen</i> Program, job readiness, student skills
Revised date	March 4, 2025	
Accepted date	March 22, 2025	

1. Introduction

With the rapidly changing needs of industries driven by technological advancements and globalization, the gap between skills taught in higher education and the demands of the workforce has become increasingly apparent. According to data from the *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS), the open unemployment rate among higher education graduates in one of Indonesia's provinces reached 5.05% in 2024, indicating that higher education graduates often face difficulties in aligning their skills with market demands [1]. The *Studi Independen* (SI) program within the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy aims to be one of the key initiatives to bridge the gap between education and the workforce [2]. Studies have shown that students participating in experiential learning programs like *Studi Independen* have a competitive advantage in terms of job readiness compared to their peers who rely solely on formal classroom education [3].

Previous research indicates that the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program significantly impacts the development of students' skills, both in soft skills and hard skills aspects. A study by Rahmawanti and Nurzaelani revealed that the implementation of

MBKM increased students' creativity by up to 97.3% and innovative thinking abilities by up to 96%, highlighting its significant influence on the development of critical and collaborative thinking skills [4]. Another study by Suwanti et al., emphasized the *Kampus Mengajar* program's role in enhancing students' perceptions of teamwork and soft skills, with positive perception levels reaching 93% [5]. Furthermore, there are studies identifying improvements in students' system analysis and programming skills during internship and *Studi Independen* programs, which are highly relevant to workforce demands [6]. Despite the numerous benefits identified, there remains a gap in research regarding the evaluation of the MBKM program's impact, particularly *Studi Independen*, on students' job readiness.

Although previous research has demonstrated the positive impact of the MBKM program on students' skill development, such as creativity, communication, and critical thinking, this study offers novelty by exploring the specific impact of the *Studi Independen* Program on students' job readiness through two main perspectives: students and business actors. Most prior studies have focused solely on students' views without delving into how business actors assess graduates who participated in the *Studi Independen* program compared to those who did not.

This article aims to evaluate the impact of the *Studi Independen* Program on students' skills and job readiness. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how students' experiences during the *Studi Independen* program help develop technical and interpersonal skills relevant to the workforce. The research also examines the perspective of business actors in assessing the competencies of students who participated in the *Studi Independen* program compared to those who did not. By combining these two perspectives, this study is expected to provide valuable insights for students who may have doubts about the *Studi Independen* program.

1.1. Statement of Problem

The *Studi Independen* Program within MBKM aims to bridge the gap between higher education and the ever-changing demands of the workforce driven by globalization and technological advancements. Although this program is recognized for enhancing students' skills, including both soft skills and hard skills, there remains a gap in understanding its overall impact on students' job readiness. This research identifies the need to evaluate how the *Studi Independen* Program contributes to the development of students' technical and interpersonal skills and how it meets the expectations of the business world from the perspective of job readiness.

1.2. Research Objectives

The purpose of this research is to understand the impact of the *Studi Independen* Program on students' skills and job readiness from the perspective of the students themselves, as well as to understand the perspective of business actors regarding students who participated in the *Studi Independen* program compared to those who did not.

2. Method

This research employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. According to Sitoyo & Sodik, qualitative research can be defined as a research method used to study natural objects where the researcher is the main instrument [7]. Thus, with that definition and the objectives taken by this research, the researcher focuses on understanding social reality from the participants' point of view. Participants in this research will be classified as informants. To select the appropriate informants, this research will use the 4R technique [8]: Relevance, ensuring that the informants have relevance to the theme of the research; Recommendation, informants are chosen based on recommendations from those certainly relevant to the research theme; Readiness, informants are ensured to be willing to conduct interviews and not forced to do so; Reassurance, informants are ensured to provide answers or data honestly and not from fabricated results.

Data collection in this research is divided into two main categories, primary data and secondary data. Primary data is data collected directly by the researcher and does not involve third parties, such as interview and observation data. Secondary data is data collected by the researcher through third parties and is not direct, such as through literature and websites [9]. The main focus of data collection in this research is through interviews, which will be conducted in two sessions: The first session is interviews with students who have participated in or are currently participating in the *Studi Independen* program; The second session is interviews with business owners who already have employee recruitment systems. The second session of interviews serves as a representative of the industry's opinion on *Studi Independen*. Informants in this research total 4, three of whom are students who have participated in the *Studi Independen* program, and one is a business actor. Data obtained through interviews will be in the form of transcripts of conversations between the researcher and the informants. Before being presented in the study, the data will go through a reduction process, where responses and discussions that are not relevant to the topic and any outliers that may exist will not be included in the transcripts presented in the discussion.

To ensure the validity of the data, this research uses several testing techniques [10]. The Credibility Test will be used to ensure the data is credible by discussing the data with experts and conducting repeated observations. The Transferability Test will be used to ensure that the data results can be understood by readers. The Dependability Test will be used to ensure that the researcher is directly involved in the research process from the beginning to the end of the article's preparation. The Confirmability Test will be used to ensure that informants provide clear or appropriate answers by re-asking or confirming the given answers. Finally, the researcher will use source triangulation to ensure that the data results remain consistent by comparing data obtained from student informant interviews, business actors, and previous literature.

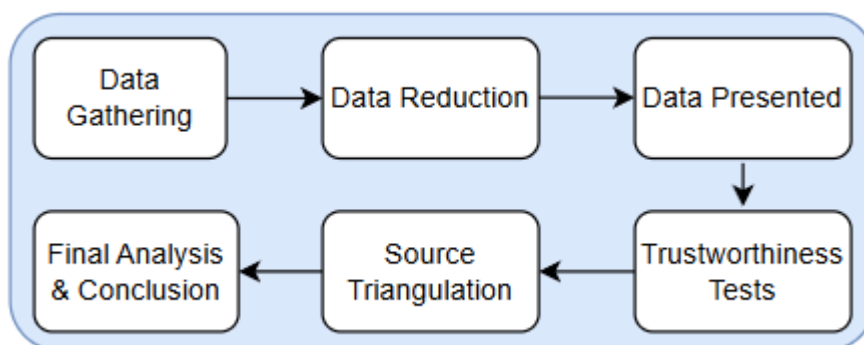


Figure 1. Data Analysis Process Flowchart

The flow of the data analysis process conducted by the researcher is depicted in Figure 1 above. To elaborate further, after the interview data is collected, the analysis process begins with data reduction to filter relevant information and eliminate outliers that do not align with the research focus. The reduced data is then organized into a structured transcript and analyzed to produce the main findings. The validity of the data is tested through several techniques, including discussions with experts, repeated observations, and reconfirmation of informants' answers. Triangulation is carried out by comparing interview data from students, business actors, and previous literature to ensure the consistency of the findings. This approach ensures that the research results have a high level of validity and reliability while providing comprehensive insights into the impact of the *Studi Independen* Program on students' job readiness.

3. Results and Discussion /Hasil dan Pembahasan

The interview results will be discussed according to each session, with the first session focusing on student informants who have participated in or are currently participating in *Studi Independen*. The first session interviews were conducted online using Google Meet and Zoom Workplace. In the first session, the researcher will ask the following questions:

Table 1. Questions for Session 1

No	Bahasa Indonesia	English
1	Silahkan perkenalan dulu, mahasiswa tingkat berapa, dari universitas mana dan jurusan apa?	Please introduce yourself. What year are you in, which university are you attending, and what is your major?
2	Apakah anda pernah mengikuti Program Merdeka Studi Independen? Jika pernah, dimana berapa lama dan kegiatan SI apa?	Have you ever participated in the Merdeka Belajar Studi Independen Program? If so, where, for how long, and in what type of activity?
3	Apa motivasi/harapan anda sebagai mahasiswa selama mengikuti program Studi Independen?	What is your motivation/hope as a student while participating in the Studi Independen program?
4	Apa saja ketrampilan kerja anda yang berkembang melalui program Studi Independen?	What work skills have you developed through the Studi Independen program?

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| <p>5 Menurut anda, bagaimana program Studi Independen yang anda ikuti berkontribusi pada kesiapan kerja anda?</p> <p>6 Dari ketrampilan yang di dapat dan harapan anda saat mengikuti program, apa saja yang menurut anda belum terpenuhi untuk menyiapkan anda di dunia kerja nanti?</p> | <p>In your opinion, how has the Studi Independen program you participated in contributed to your readiness for the workforce?</p> <p>Based on the skills you gained and your expectations from the program, what do you think has not yet been fulfilled to fully prepare you for the job market?</p> |
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With the list of questions already presented in Table 1, the reduced transcript will now be presented. The transcript will be provided in *Bahasa Indonesia* and then summarized and interpreted in English. It is important to note that the researcher will be referred to as "P," while informants will be assigned initials corresponding to their names. The following are the results of the interviews with informants from the first session:

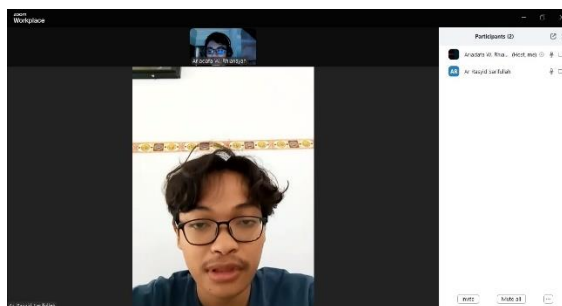


Figure 2. Interview with Informant 1

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| <p>P: Selamat pagi, silahkan perkenalkan dulu, mahasiswa tingkat berapa, dari universitas mana dan jurusan apa?</p> <p>P: Universitas apa ya?</p> <p>P: Kita lanjut ke pertanyaan selanjutnya, apakah Anda pernah mengikuti program Merdeka Studi Independen? Jika pernah, di mana, berapa lama, dan kegiatan SI apa?</p> <p>P: Berapa lama itu Kak?</p> <p>P: Oke, kita lanjut ke pertanyaan selanjutnya ya, apa motivasi atau harapan Anda sebagai mahasiswa selama mengikuti program Studi Independen yang Anda ikuti?</p> | <p>AR: Baik, perkenalkan nama saya Ar-Rasyid Sarifullah Gilbijatno, saya dari Prodi Teknik Informatika tingkat 4.</p> <p>AR: Universitas Nusantara PKRI Kediri.</p> <p>AR: Saya pernah mengikuti program Studi Independen di Yayasan Adipurna Inovasi Asia, atau biasanya disebutnya itu Vokasia, pada saat saya masih tingkat 4, berarti semester 5. Jadi saya disana mengambil topik tentang front-end web developer, khususnya tentang pembuatan website menggunakan React.js dan Firebase. Jadi disana saya banyak belajar tentang membangun website, khususnya untuk front-end atau bagian elemen yang berkontribusi untuk UI/UX.</p> <p>AR: Satu semester, sekitar 5-6 bulan.</p> <p>AR: Harapannya mungkin lebih ditingkatkan, maksudnya begini, selama saya mengikuti program Studi Independen, baik di tempat saya magang dan juga di tempat teman saya magang, sebenarnya saya tanya-tanya bagaimana pengalamannya, pengalamannya dari teman-teman yang lain, sebenarnya dari satu semester, 5-6 bulan itu, ada begitu banyak kegiatan yang sia-sia, maksud saya</p> |
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- P: Oke, nah itu tadi kan harapan Anda sebagai mahasiswa yang mengikuti ini. Nah, sekarang apa saja ketampilan kerja Anda yang berkembang di program studi independen Anda?
- AR: *begini, satu minggu itu, untuk saya itu hanya satu pertemuan, itupun hanya 2 jam, di jam malam, dari jam 7-9 atau sebagainya. Nah, itu pun tugasnya cukup gampang.*
- P: Jadi menurut Anda, bagaimana program studi independen ini yang Anda ikuti berkontribusi pada kesiapan kerja Anda?
- AR: *Jadi yang pertama itu kemampuan untuk bekerjasama. Jadi di Fokasia itu dituntut untuk bekerja sama, jadi ada berkelompok 1-3 atau 4 itu. Yang pertama bekerja sama, kemudian skill berpresentasi, atau mungkin istilahnya public speaking. Selanjutnya ada pengembangan website tentu saja dari bagian front-endnya, dari bagian desain dan juga UI/UX. Kemudian ada API, atau bagian bagaimana kita berkontribusi atau saling terhubung antara front-end dengan back-end. Selanjutnya ada version control system, bagaimana kita melakukan repository, atau istilahnya melakukan remote pada publik domain. Akhirnya ada yang terakhir itu full stack, jadi ada sedikit full stacknya di sini, walaupun temanya adalah front-end, jadi berkolaborasi antara React.js dan juga back-endnya sebagai serverless firebase.*
- P: Dari keterampilan kerja yang didapat dan harapan yang Anda ada saat mengikuti program, apa saja yang menurut Anda belum terpenuhi untuk menyiapkan Anda di dunia kerja nanti?
- AR: *Sebenarnya membangun dasar-dasarnya. Jadi studi independen ini sebenarnya bukan sesuatu yang membuat kita menjadi seakan-akan lebih keren atau lebih hebat dari siapapun, tapi lebih ke dasar-dasarnya. Walaupun topiknya adalah front-end, tapi kan di sana malah diajarkan dasar-dasarnya. Jadi dari membuat web dasar dari HTML dan juga CSS dan sebagainya. Tapi bagaimana itu mendukung keterampilan kerja saya? Sebenarnya dari pengalaman. Jadi setiap minggu itu sebenarnya ada project, jadi pengalaman-pengalaman itu yang bisa saya gunakan untuk berkembang, kemudian pengalaman itu juga yang bisa saya masukkan ke dalam portfolio saya.*
- P: Untuk skills-nya mungkin? Yang dasar-dasar mungkin? Atau sudah oke?
- AR: *Mungkin yang paling penting, cheatsheet atau contekan bagaimana saat kita diwawancarai. Ini kan juga salah satu hal yang penting juga untuk ketika kita masuk kerja. Kemudian selanjutnya adalah bagaimana membangun portfolio yang baik. Jadi mereka cuma mengasih tugas tanpa memberikan bagaimana cara membangun portfolio atau branding diri yang baik. Mungkin itu saja sih.*
- P: Itu untuk interview kali ini. Terima kasih sudah meluangkan waktu pagi hari ini. Terima kasih, Terima kasih, Kak Rasyid.
- AR: *Mungkin kalau yang dasar sudah oke. Cuma ke intermediate sampai ke advanced itu yang masih belum. Soalnya kan masih, mungkin di studi independen saya masih dasar-dasarnya.*
- AR: *Iya, Mas. Sukses, sukses, sukses, sukses.*

The recap of the interview with Ar-Rasyid Sarifullah Gilbijatno, a fourth-year Informatics Engineering student at University of Nusantara PGRI Kediri, revealed his participation in the *Merdeka Belajar Studi Independen* program at Yayasan Adipurna Inovasi

Asia (Vokasia). Over one semester (5–6 months), he focused on front-end web development using React.js and Firebase. Rasyid expressed mixed feelings about the program. He appreciated the opportunity to build fundamental skills such as collaboration, public speaking, UI/UX design, API integration, and version control systems, as well as gaining basic experience in full-stack development. However, he noted some shortcomings, including limited interaction and simple tasks, as well as a lack of guidance on advanced technical skills, job interview preparation, and professional portfolio building. Although the program provided practical experience and contributed to Rasyid's readiness by enabling him to create a portfolio through weekly projects, he felt that more could be done to address intermediate and advanced skill development and career preparation.



Figure 3. Interview with Informant 2

- P: Oke, kita langsung mulai. Selamat siang. Terima kasih sudah meluangkan waktu. Boleh, silakan perkenalkan dulu, mahasiswa tingkat berapa, dari mahasiswa mana, eh dari universitas mana, dan jurusan apa?
- M: Oke, aku alumni dari Universitas Nusantara PGRI Kediri, kebetulan jurusannya manajemen, ya barusan lulus tahun kemarin sih, eh tahun ini deh, tahun ini, lupa ya, masih 2024. Aku Margareta, panggilannya biasanya Tata gitu.
- P: Oke Mbak Tata, apakah Anda pernah mengikuti program Merdeka Studi Independen, jika pernah, di mana, dan berapa lama, dan kegiatan SI apa?
- M: Oke, aku pernah ikut MSIB ya, aku bilang MSIB dulu, itu studi independen di PT Stechoq Robotika Indonesia, itu tempatnya di Yogyakarta, nah kebetulan aku ambil di business development, jadi programnya itu business development gitu. Eh, sama apa tadi?
- P: Berapa lama?
- M: Oke, sekitar ada kalau 4 bulan, 5 bulanan lah, total semuanya itu 5 bulan ada.
- P: Oke, kurang lebih 1 semester berarti ya Mbak Tata?
- M: Iya, kurang lebih 1 semester
- P: Apa motivasi atau harapan Anda sebagai mahasiswa pada saat itu selama mengikuti program studi independen?
- M: Oke, kalau aku sih motivasinya karena aku nggak mau diam aja di lingkungan kampus ya, karena aku merasa kalau misalnya zaman sekarang, kalau diam aja di lingkungan kampus itu kayak ilmunya masih kurang gitu loh, karena kan kita SI ya, sedangkan kalau setau aku, kalau diploma itu kan banyak praktiknya, sedangkan kalau sarjana atau SI itu kan kita lebih menekankan pada teori, nah di mana aku cari praktiknya selain beberapa kegiatan kampus, aku juga memberanikan diri untuk nyoba ikutin MSIB ini, karena di sana itu aku kan belajar

- P: *Dia pengen melebarkan sayap ya?*
- P: *Kalau tadi kan motivasi nih, nah sekarang apa saja keterampilan kerja Anda yang berkembang melalui program studi independen ini?*
- P: *Menurut Anda bagaimana program studi independen yang Anda ikuti berkontribusi pada kesiapan kerja Anda?*
- P: *Kita lanjut langsung ke pertanyaan yang terakhir. Dari kerampilan yang didapat dan harapan Anda saat mengikuti program ini, apa saja yang menurut Anda belum terpenuhi untuk menyiapkan Anda di dunia kerja nanti?*
- M: *Iya benar.*
- M: *Oke, untuk keterampilan yang berkembang aku ngerasain banget itu ketika pitching ya, aku dulu masih terbatas banget cara aku present, cara aku presentasi terkait sebuah project itu aku minim banget, tapi setelah aku ikut MSIB ini kan di situ kita project, akhirnya itu kita pitching. Oh ternyata gini ya, cara kita menyampaikan satu project, ngenalin ke seorang investor itu kayak gini, terus lain itu ada yang namanya project management, di situ aku benar-benar belajar banget apa sih project management, gimana sih caranya, seperti apa sih menjadi seorang project manager itu, dari situ aku dapet ilmunya banyak banget.*
- M: *Oke, kontribusinya sih bisa dikatakan besar ya, karena apa? Kita jadi berani gitu loh, kita tahu dunia kerja itu kayak apa, ada gambarannya di situ, kita ngadepin investor, kita ngadepin sebuah project, dimana kan kalau misalnya nanti kita masuk dunia kerja, kita nggak akan lepas jauh-jauh dari yang namanya sebuah project. Entah itu di sebuah perusahaan atau di sebuah mungkin startup gitu ya, kita nggak akan lepas-lepas dari itu yang namanya project, dan kita pasti ngadepin yang namanya investor, entah itu secara skala kecil maupun skala besar. Karena di situ yang bikin mental kita itu tertata, mental kita itu kayak siap, oh macam ini ya, oh seperti ini, jadi sifat-sifatnya investor atau jenis-jenis project yang akan kita hadapi itu di situ ada gambarannya. Ya, mungkin saat itu masih secara kecil, tapi kalau saat ini benar-benar kelihatan banget deh kayak kesiapannya kita untuk ke dunia kerja dari, apa ya istilahnya, manfaatnya kita ikut program MSIB itu.*
- M: *Apa ya, kalau yang belum terpenuhi itu sebenarnya nggak ada sih ya, bisa dibilang nggak ada, tapi kembali lagi ke diri kita masing-masing. Tinggal kita itu melupakan apa nggak dengan keterampilan itu tadi, berani nggak menunjukkan itu di dunia kerja yang sesungguhnya. Jadi kalau misalnya kita nggak berani, meskipun kita pede nih antar sesama teman, antar sesama angkatan, tapi kita nggak berani buat nunjukin hal itu ke dunia luar, ya itu tenggelam lagi. Mungkin kalau untuk programnya yang belum terrealisasi dengan baik, menurutku setiap program itu pasti punya kekurangannya. Jadi nggak masalah,*

kayak aku sejauh ini sudah tidak mempermasalahkannya itu ya. Tapi kalau dengar isu-isu yang barusan ini, katanya programnya mau hilang gitu, sebenarnya agak disayangkan ya. Karena bagi mahasiswa-mahasiswa yang memang mempunyai tipe pemikiran yang seperti nggak mau diam saja di tempat, atau ingin melebarkan sayapnya yang tadi kamu bilang, itu program ini sangat berguna. Jadi kalau misalnya hilang ya eman-eman gitu.

P: *Oke, terima kasih Mbak Tata untuk sudah meluangkan waktunya di siang hari ini. Mau diganggu waktunya. Terima kasih amat-sangat opini yang bagus. Nanti tinggal diolah. Terima kasih, Kak.*

M: *Iya, sama-sama semangat ya. Amin. Aku leave ya.*

Margaretha is an alumna of University of Nusantara PGRI Kediri from the Management department. She participated in the *Studi Independen* program in Business Development at PT Stechoq Robotika Indonesia, Yogyakarta, for approximately 4–5 months or one semester. Margaretha was motivated to gain practical experience beyond the more theoretical learning in her university. She wanted to learn directly from professional practitioners to understand real-world applications of the theories taught in lectures while also broadening her insights and skills beyond the campus environment. Margaretha experienced significant skill development during the MSIB program. One of the most notable skills she acquired was pitching, where she learned effective ways to present and communicate project ideas to investors. She also developed a deep understanding of project management, including how to effectively manage and complete projects.

In the program, Margaretha gained hands-on experience in the role of a project manager, from planning to project execution, providing her with valuable preparation for the workforce. Margaretha revealed that the program's outcomes heavily depend on individuals, particularly on how they apply the skills acquired to the professional world. She did not note specific shortcomings of the program but expressed regret at the possibility of such programs being discontinued, given their significant benefits for proactive students seeking experiences outside the campus. Margaretha feels that the MSIB program was highly beneficial in developing practical skills and preparing her for her future career. She considers the program suitable for students looking to broaden their horizons and enhance their skills beyond the classroom.

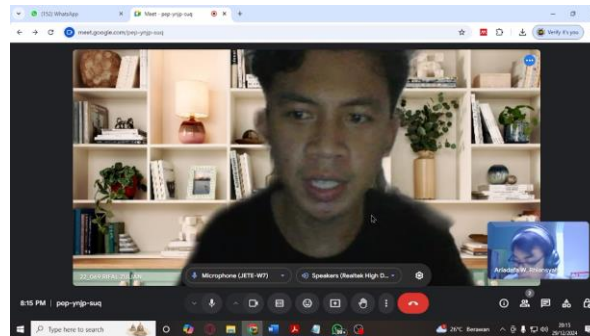


Figure 4. Interview with Informant 3

- P: Selamat malam, silahkan perkenalkan dulu, mahasiswa tingkat berapa, dari universitas mana dan jurusan apa?
- P: Untuk pertanyaan pertama nih, apakah Anda pernah mengikuti program Merdeka Studi Independen, jika pernah, di mana, dan berapa lama, dan kegiatan SI apa?
- P: Oke, oke, sekarang apa saja ketrampilan kerja anda yang berkembang melalui program Studi Independen?
- P: Baik, menurut anda, bagaimana program Studi Independen yang anda ikuti berkontribusi pada kesiapan kerja anda?
- P: Dari ketrampilan yang di dapat dan harapan anda saat mengikuti program, apa saja yang menurut anda belum terpenuhi untuk menyiapkan anda di dunia kerja nanti?
- RZ: Perkenalkan nama saya Rifal Zulian dari jurusan Manajemen di Universitas Sam Ratulangi, sekarang tingkat 3 jadi menuju semester 6.
- RZ: Oke, saya sendiri pernah ikut Studi Independen di PT Indolbit Digital Raya, atau dikenal sebagai BitLabs Academy. Dengan programnya itu, Data Analytics for Business, dengan durasi selama kurang lebih 4 bulan. Dari bulan September hingga Desember, baru beres kemarin. Untuk motivasinya sendiri, karena memang ingin mempertajam apa yang sudah didapatkan di perkuliahan. Sebelumnya di perkuliahan belum setajam yang dipelajari di Studi Independen.
- RZ: Untuk keterampilan yang dikembangkan tentunya ada banyak ya. Terutama dalam segi bisnis itu sendiri karena di perkuliahan karena saya kuliah juga seorang ekonomi itu belajar bisnisnya kurang gitu. Jadi selama ikut studi independen itu mempertahankan di bisnis atau bikin BPM yang benar-benar bisa business modeling bisa diisi jadi lebih efektif. Bisa jadi lebih tajam. Kemudian berpengaruh juga dari ketrampilan teknisnya seperti bisa SQL, Python dan visualisasi data yang lebih advanced dengan menggunakan Tableau.
- RZ: Oke, kontribusi dari studi independen terhadap kesiapan kerja itu terhadap ada tugas-tugas yang diberikan gitu ya. Karena itu sesuai dengan standar industri juga. Jadi dengan kesiapan diberikan itu bisa memberikan wawasan yang lebih luas terhadap akhirnya nanti kita di kerjaan itu bakal kayak gimana sih.
- RZ: Mungkin yang kurang itu di bagian python belum terlalu dalam juga. Kemudian dari sisi query juga mungkin bisa lebih dipertajam lagi materi-materinya. Kemudian dari sisi Tableau sendiri itu juga masih agak sedikit bisa lebih di tingkatkan lagi. Kalau untuk kesiapan kerja sendiri ini, tentu lebih baik daripada yang tidak ikut. Karena kalau lulus dari Studi Independen, sertifikat dan tugas-tugas yang di kerjain itu sudah standar dari industri. Kemudian dari sisi pengetahuan terhadap dunia

kerjanya, kemudian bagaimana belajar profesionalisme dalam bekerja, itu kan kalau misalnya nggak ikut SI tentunya nggak bakal berarti ya bagaimana-gimanya, gitu.

P: *Oh begitu ya kak, baiklah kak, terima kasih banyak sudah menjadi narasumber.* RZ: *Iya kak, semangat.... saya ijin leave ya.*

Rifal Zulian is a third-year student, in his fifth semester transitioning into the sixth, from the Management department at Sam Ratulangi University, North Sulawesi. He participated in the *Studi Independen* program at PT Indolbit Digital Raya, commonly known as BitLabs Academy, focusing on the "Data Analytics for Business" program from September to December, or approximately four months. Rifal was motivated to enhance his data analysis skills, which he had not explored in depth during his coursework. He aimed to acquire more relevant and practical skills to support his future career. During the program, Rifal developed various skills, ranging from business abilities such as creating more effective Business Process Models (BPM) to technical skills like mastering SQL, Python, and advanced data visualization using Tableau. Additionally, he gained a deep understanding of data analysis techniques tailored to industry needs.

Rifal felt that the assignments in this program were aligned with industry standards, helping him understand workplace expectations and enhancing his professional readiness. He also noted several aspects that he believed could be improved, such as deeper coverage of Python, SQL queries, and the use of Tableau. Nevertheless, overall, he assessed that the *Studi Independen* program provided a highly beneficial experience. The program not only helped him sharpen his skills but also offered broader insights into professionalism and workplace culture in the industry. With the certificates and experience gained, Rifal feels more confident in facing the challenges of the professional world compared to those who did not participate in similar programs.

With the interviews of the three informants from the first session already presented, the researcher will proceed with the results of the second session interviews, which involve business actors and the researcher. As with the presentation of the first session interviews, the transcripts in the second session have undergone a data reduction process to ensure the data is easily understood by readers. The transcripts will be presented in Bahasa Indonesia and subsequently summarized in English. The researcher in the transcript will continue to be referred to with the initial "P," while the informants will be identified with initials corresponding to their names.



Figure 5. Interview with Owner of CV. Progull Jaya

- P: Selamat sore, ini saya bersama dengan pemilik, mohon diperkenalkan dulu pak?
- P: CV Progul Jaya itu bergerak di bidang apa sekarang?
- P: Sekarang perusahaannya, udah berjalan beberapa tahun dan memiliki berapa banyak karyawan?
- P: Oke baik, sekarang kita masuk ke pertanyaan intinya ya pak, Bapak apakah pernah mendengar yang namanya program Merdeka Studi Independen ataupun Magang yang bersertifikat dari kampus-kampus Merdeka?
- P: Ini saya kebetulan ada pertanyaan yang akan menarik opini Bapak Sebagai pemilik usaha terhadap mahasiswa-mahasiswa yang ikut di Studi Independen. Pertanyaan saya ini, apakah dengan peningkatan keterampilan ini Bapak sebagai pelaku usaha lebih memilih mahasiswa lulusan Studi Independen Atau tetap sebanding dengan mahasiswa yang tidak ikut program?
- P: Bapak lebih memilih ikut SI, kalau misal Bapak bandingkan ada pemilihan mahasiswa yang ikut katakanlah PKL, praktik kerja lapangan. Ada juga yang namanya Magang bersertifikat yang asli datang ke perusahaannya ikut bekerja sebagai karyawan, kalau dibandingkan dengan Studi Independen dan pilihannya ada tiga itu tadi, opini Bapak gimana?
- P: Bapak kan beropini kalau lebih baik menerima mahasiswa yang lulusan Magang daripada mahasiswa Studi Independen. Tapi kalau misal ada mahasiswa yang ingin melembarkan sayapnya mereka ke program-program seperti ini apakah Bapak menganjurkan
- AS: Perkenalkan nama saya, nama lengkap, Mohammad Andi Sufi Kumoro selaku pemilik CV Progul Jaya.
- AS: CV Progul Jaya bergerak di bidang konveksi taktis Jadi pengadaan untuk pembuatan perlengkapan taktis bagi TNI dan Polri.
- AS: Progul saya dirikan di tahun 2015, jadi hampir 10 tahun ya, tapi CVnya baru satu tahun ini, jumlah karyawan ada 12 orang.
- AS: Sudah, sudah pernah
- AS: Kalau menurut saya ya, kalau dilihat dari skill serta kesiapan bekerja ya, Saya pribadi lebih memilih ke mahasiswa yang ikut SI ya.
- AS: Kalau diberi pilihan tiga ya, dengan salah satunya adalah peserta Magang, saya cenderung ke mahasiswa peserta Magang. Karena kalau seumpama di sini ada mahasiswa Magang kan, nanti dia sudah tahu seperti apa toh kerja dan kinerja. Jadi apabila di suatu saat dia ingin meneruskan menjadi karyawan tetap nanti kita tidak perlu mengulangi, mengajari mereka tentang jobdesc mereka di tempat ini. Nanti bisa langsung dilanjutkan seperti itu.
- AS: Ya betul, jadi kalau diminta seperti itu, ya sepertinya memang untuk menambah skill dan kesiapan serta nilai plus apabila nanti melamar pekerjaan sebuah perusahaan memang dianjurkan untuk mahasiswa untuk menambah program SI itu tadi, menurut saya seperti itu.

Studi Independen ini sebagai platform biar dia bisa siap untuk kerja?

- P: Baik pak, itu saja pertanyaan saya, terima kasih sudah meluangkan waktu, semoga sukses perusahaannya
- AS: Amin, sama-sama, terima kasih, semoga membantu.

Mohammad Andi Sufi Kumoro is the owner of CV Progul Jaya, a tactical manufacturing company specializing in the production of tactical equipment for the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI) and the National Police (Polri). The company was established in 2015 and has been operating for nearly 10 years, with its CV status officially registered in the past year. Currently, CV Progul Jaya employs 12 staff members.

Andi is familiar with the *Merdeka Belajar* program, including *Studi Independen* and certified internships. According to him, graduates of the *Studi Independen* program tend to have better job-ready skills compared to those who do not participate in similar programs. However, if given a choice between *Studi Independen* participants, certified internships, and fieldwork practice, he prefers students who have participated in certified internships. This preference is because internship participants already have real work experience in a company and understand tasks and responsibilities, making the transition to full-time employees easier without the need for additional training.

Although he prefers internship students, Andi acknowledges that *Studi Independen* remains a good platform for enhancing students' skills and job readiness. He recommends this program for students who want to add value when applying for jobs. He also believes the program is beneficial in enriching practical experiences and skills needed in the workforce. As a business actor, Andi recognizes the importance of programs like *Studi Independen* in supporting students' job readiness. He also encourages students to take advantage of this platform as an opportunity to improve their skills and gain professional experience.

Considering the data presented above, the researcher will conduct triangulation using the source triangulation method. The first source is interview data conducted with students who have participated in *Studi Independen*, the second source is interviews with business actors, and the last source is previous literature. Overall, based on the results of interviews from the students' perspective, they stated that *Studi Independen* has indeed succeeded in improving their job readiness. Business actors also expressed similar views, stating that students who participate in programs like *Studi Independen* have an added value compared to those who do not. Both sources align with previous studies that state *Studi Independen* contributes significantly to students' job readiness.

Based on data findings through interviews with students, it can be said that the *Studi Independen* Program helps develop technical skills such as data analysis using SQL and Tableau, UI/UX design, and API integration. In addition, students also acquire soft skills such

as communication, teamwork, and project management. However, although the program provides a strong foundational knowledge, some students feel they lack the development of advanced skills, from intermediate to advanced levels, as well as guidance in preparing for job interviews and creating portfolios. Business actors tend to view graduates of *Studi Independen* as more job-ready compared to those who did not participate in the program. However, when compared to certified internship participants, business actors prefer interns because they already have real work experience in companies.

4. Conclusion

This research found that the *Studi Independen* Program within MBKM contributes significantly to improving students' skills relevant to job readiness, both in technical and interpersonal aspects. From the students' perspective, this program provides practical experiences that enhance technical skills such as mastery of technologies (React.js, Firebase, SQL, Python, Tableau) as well as the development of managerial skills, such as project management and pitching to investors. Students also noted improvements in soft skills, including communication, teamwork, and confidence in facing professional work situations. From the perspective of business actors, the program is considered beneficial because students participating in *Studi Independen* demonstrate better job readiness compared to those who do not join the program. Business actors appreciate students' skills in understanding workplace expectations and the professionalism required in a work environment. However, although this program makes a significant contribution, some aspects, such as advanced technical material depth and guidance in creating professional portfolios, are still considered less optimal by students.

This research provides significant contributions in two main areas: science and policy practice. From a scientific perspective, this research fills a gap in the literature related to the impact evaluation of the *Studi Independen* Program in preparing students for the workforce. By combining the perspectives of students and business actors, this research offers new insights into the program's effectiveness in improving technical skills, interpersonal abilities, and professionalism. The novelty of this research also lies in its interdisciplinary approach, which allows for a broader understanding of the program's contribution to a complex and diverse workforce. From the perspective of practice and policy, the findings of this research provide a strong foundation for policymakers in higher education institutions to optimize the design and implementation of the *Studi Independen* program. The research results can be used to design programs that are more relevant to industry needs, including enhanced guidance in building professional portfolios and deepening advanced technical materials. This research also encourages the business sector to be more open in providing support for experience-based education programs.

This research has several limitations that need to be considered. The scope of participants is limited to students participating in the *Studi Independen* program and business actors in a

relatively small number, so the research results may not fully represent the diversity of experiences of students in various fields of study or industrial backgrounds. This research also uses a qualitative method that relies on interviews and individual perceptions, which, although providing in-depth insights, can be subjective and limited in generalizability. It is recommended for future researchers who wish to explore this topic to use quantitative methods so that the data obtained is empirical and extensive. There is also a suggestion to conduct studies comparing *Studi Independen dan Magang Bersertifikat*.

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