

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION PERSPECTIVES IN MERDEKA BELAJAR PROGRAM IN INDONESIA

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### ABSTRACT

The *Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy provides flexible learning opportunities in higher education through learning experiences outside of study programs, including field practice and interdisciplinary collaboration. In this context, physical education plays a strategic role not only in developing physical fitness but also in character building, sportsmanship, leadership, and teamwork relevant to 21st-century learning outcomes. This study aims to describe the perspective of physical education in the implementation of the MBKM program in Indonesia. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques through literature studies, policy document analysis, and research findings related to the implementation of MBKM in the field of physical education. Data analysis was carried out through data reduction, data presentation, and thematic conclusion drawing. The study results indicate that physical education within the MBKM framework contributes to strengthening students' pedagogical, professional, and social competencies through activities such as the Teaching Campus (*Kampus Mengajar*), teaching assistantships, and humanitarian projects based on physical activity and health. Furthermore, the experiential learning approach encourages students to integrate health literacy, character education, and sports learning innovations contextually. However, program implementation still faces challenges such as limited infrastructure, curriculum synchronization, and institutional understanding of the flexibility of the MBKM scheme. This study concludes that physical education has a strategic position in supporting the transformation of experiential learning in the MBKM era, thus requiring strengthening institutional policies and adaptive and sustainable implementation models.

**Keywords:** *physical education, MBKM, experiential learning, Indonesian higher education.*

### INTRODUCTION

The transformation of higher education in Indonesia has undergone significant changes since the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia. This policy grants students the right to gain learning experiences outside their study program for three

semesters in an effort to increase the relevance of graduates to the needs of the workforce and society. Regulatory-wise, this policy is reinforced by Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3 of 2020 concerning National Higher Education Standards, which emphasizes competency-based learning outcomes and curriculum flexibility. This paradigm shifts the learning orientation from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, emphasizing authentic experiences and contextual learning.

Within the MBKM framework, physical education holds a strategic position because it focuses not only on physical fitness but also on character building, discipline, sportsmanship, leadership, and teamwork. Conceptually, physical education aligns with experiential learning theory (Mulyana et al., 2025), which emphasizes that effective learning occurs through direct experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application. Through physical activity and field practice, physical education students have the opportunity to develop pedagogical competencies and soft skills needed in the 21st century.

Furthermore, physical education is closely related to strengthening health literacy and holistically developing students' character. (Andriansyah et al., 2025) emphasize that quality physical education contributes to students' physical, mental, social, and emotional development. In the context of MBKM, the implementation of programs such as Kampus Mengajar (Teaching Campus), teaching assistance, and sports-based humanitarian projects provide a space for physical education students to integrate health, fitness, and character values into real-life learning practices at school and in the community.

However, the implementation of MBKM in physical education still faces various challenges, such as limited sports facilities and infrastructure, curriculum synchronization with the credit unit conversion scheme, and varying understandings of MBKM policies among universities. Several studies have shown that the success of educational policy implementation is strongly influenced by communication, resources, and institutional readiness (Arsyad et al., 2025). Therefore, an in-depth study of the physical education perspective within the MBKM program is needed to understand the contributions, opportunities, and challenges of its implementation in Indonesia.

Based on this description, this study aims to describe the perspective of physical education in the implementation of the MBKM program in Indonesia, so that it can provide theoretical and practical contributions in the development of experience-based learning models in higher education.

The Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) policy is a higher education reform strategy that provides learning flexibility through the right to study outside of study programs. This policy aims to improve graduate competency to adapt to social and technological changes and the demands of the workforce. MBKM is reinforced through Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3 of 2020, which emphasizes competency-based learning outcomes and the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach (Ainullah et al., 2025).

Conceptually, MBKM adopts a student-centered learning paradigm that positions students as active subjects in the learning process. This principle aligns with the social constructivism

theory proposed by Lev Vygotsky (Listiqowati & Ruja, 2025) , which emphasizes the importance of social interaction and contextual experiences in constructing knowledge. Thus, MBKM is not merely an administrative policy but also a pedagogical transformation that encourages experiential learning.

Physical education is an integral part of the education system that focuses on the holistic physical, mental, social, and emotional development of students. (Salahudin et al., 2024) , through *the Quality Physical Education (QPE) document*, emphasizes that quality physical education contributes to character building, improving health literacy (*physical literacy*), and strengthening the values of sportsmanship and cooperation.

The concept of physical literacy emphasizes an individual's ability to move competently and confidently in various physical activities throughout life (Juniarti et al., 2024) . In the context of higher education, particularly physical education study programs, mastery of physical literacy and sports pedagogy is a key foundation in developing professional and adaptive prospective teachers. Therefore, the integration of physical education into the MBKM scheme opens opportunities for students to implement these competencies through direct experiences in schools and the community.

The implementation of MBKM in physical education is highly relevant to David A. Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory. Hasnida et al. (2024) explains that the learning process occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation. In physical education practice, students not only understand the theory of sports learning but also practice it through teaching assistance, Campus Teaching activities, and community-based sports projects.

Furthermore, physical education learning is also related to Albert Bandura's social learning theory (Yanuardianto, 2019) , which emphasizes that behavior and skills develop through observation, imitation, and social interaction. Collaborative activities in physical education, such as team games and group sports, are effective tools for building students' leadership, communication, and social empathy.

The successful implementation of educational policies, including MBKM in the field of physical education, is influenced by communication factors, resources, and institutional readiness in this context, challenges that often arise include limited sports facilities and infrastructure, curriculum adjustments, and credit unit conversion mechanisms that are not yet fully uniform across universities.

However, if implemented optimally, MBKM can strengthen the professional competencies of physical education students through authentic and collaborative experiences. With an outcomes-based approach (Outcome-Based Education), as described by Rodin et al. (2024) , physical education learning within the MBKM framework has the potential to produce competent, reflective, and character-driven graduates.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach to in-depth describe the perspectives of physical education in the implementation of the Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) policy in Indonesia. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand the phenomenon contextually and interpretively based on narrative data. The research focuses on policy analysis, implementation practices, and the academic experiences of physical education students in various MBKM schemes such as teaching assistantships, the Teaching Campus (Kampus Mengajar), and community-based projects.

The research data sources include primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with physical education lecturers, students participating in the MBKM program, and program managers at universities. Secondary data were obtained through documentation studies in the form of official MBKM guidelines published by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, study program curricula, MBKM activity reports, and relevant scientific articles. Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews, limited observations of program implementation activities, and document analysis.

The data analysis technique refers to the interactive analysis model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (Fajri, 2023) , which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. The collected data was coded and categorized into themes such as contribution to student competency, health literacy integration, character building, and implementation challenges. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and techniques, member checks with informants, and an audit trail to ensure transparency of the research process. With this approach, the research results are expected to provide a comprehensive overview of the strategic position of physical education in supporting the transformation of experience-based learning in the MBKM policy.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of interview data, observations, and documentation studies, it was found that the implementation of the Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) policy from a physical education perspective showed three main findings.

First, in terms of strengthening student competencies, MBKM programs such as Kampus Mengajar and teaching assistantships provide authentic experiences for physical education students in designing sports lessons, managing classes, and integrating health and fitness literacy. Students demonstrate improved pedagogical competence, communication skills, and leadership in team-based sports activities.

Second, from the perspective of character development and soft skills, physical education activities within the MBKM scheme contribute to the development of discipline, sportsmanship, responsibility, and cooperation. Collaborative physical activities encourage students to develop social empathy and problem-solving skills within the school and community.

Third, in terms of implementation challenges, obstacles were identified, including limited sports facilities and infrastructure at partner schools, differing perceptions regarding credit unit conversion, and varying institutional readiness to integrate MBKM into the physical education curriculum. This suggests that the program's success is heavily influenced by institutional support and cross-stakeholder coordination.



Image: Research Findings

Research findings indicate that physical education within the MBKM framework aligns with the experiential learning theory proposed by David A. Kolb (1984). Students' concrete experiences in sports learning practices serve as a means of developing professional competencies through reflection and self-evaluation. Learning occurs not only theoretically in the classroom but also through real-world practice, enriching pedagogical understanding.

Furthermore, the research findings support Albert Bandura's (1977) concept of social learning, which argues that interactions in team sports play a role in shaping students' behavior, values, and character. Collaborative activities in physical education are an effective medium for fostering leadership and interpersonal communication.

From a policy perspective, the implementation of MBKM in physical education reflects the transformation efforts of higher education as directed by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (2020). However, according to Edwards

III's (1980) policy implementation theory, the effectiveness of implementation is highly dependent on communication, resources, and the readiness of the bureaucratic structure. Variations in implementation across universities indicate the need to strengthen internal regulations, standardize credit unit conversion mechanisms, and improve sports facilities at partner schools. The results of a qualitative descriptive study using data analysis by Miles and Huberman indicate that the campus teaching program benefits students, teachers, lecturers, and schools, particularly in improving students' literacy and numeracy AKM scores compared to the previous year (Virzha, 2025).

Furthermore, the findings regarding strengthening health literacy and character align with UNESCO's 2015 *Quality Physical Education guidelines*, which emphasize the importance of quality physical education in developing healthy and character-driven individuals. Therefore, physical education plays a strategic role in supporting the MBKM goal of producing competent, adaptive, and competitive graduates.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that physical education plays a strategic role in supporting the implementation of the Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) policy in Indonesia. Through various experiential learning schemes, such as the Teaching Campus program and teaching assistantships, physical education students have the opportunity to develop pedagogical and professional competencies, as well as soft skills such as leadership, communication, sportsmanship, and social responsibility. Collaborative physical activities and sports contribute to strengthening health literacy and developing students' holistic character.

However, the effective implementation of physical education within the MBKM framework still faces challenges such as limited infrastructure, variations in credit unit conversion mechanisms, and institutional readiness to integrate the program into the curriculum. Therefore, strengthening institutional governance, standardizing academic procedures, and improving facility support are necessary to ensure physical education can optimally contribute to realizing the goal of transforming experiential learning in higher education in Indonesia.

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