

Biology Education Students' Perceptions of the Benefits and Challenges of Cross-Department Lectures in the PMM Program at UMM

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ABSTRACT

Higher education in Indonesia is faced with various challenges in the era of globalization, which demands adaptation and innovation to produce graduates who are ready to compete at the global level. In response to this challenge, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology introduced the Independent Student Exchange Program (PMM) within the Independent Campus initiative. This program allows students to study outside their home university for one semester, providing the opportunity to broaden their horizons, skills, and experiences. This research aims to explore Biology Education students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges they experience when taking cross-major courses at the University of Muhammadiyah Malang in the PMM program. The research method used was a qualitative descriptive approach with an open questionnaire instrument distributed to five PMM student participants. Research results show that students gain a variety of benefits from this program, including new perspectives, improved practical skills, diverse academic experiences, and expanded knowledge across disciplines. However, students also face various challenges, such as academic difficulties in understanding new material, differences in teaching methods, social and cultural adaptation, as well as technical and logistical obstacles. In conclusion, although PMM provides valuable learning experiences and enriches students' abilities, there is a need for better support to help them overcome the challenges they face. The results of this research can be a reference for improving the implementation of the PMM program in the future, so that it is more effective in supporting students' academic and personal development.

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INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Indonesia faces various challenges in the era of globalization that demands adaptation and innovation (Melsa, *et al.*, 2022). This challenge arises from

society's demand for graduates who have skills and knowledge that are relevant to the dynamics of ever-changing times (Bisri, *et al.*, 2023; Putra, *et al.*, 2024). One of the responses from the Indonesian government through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and

Technology (Kemdikbudristek) was to introduce the Independent Student Exchange Program (PMM) as part of the Independent Campus initiative (Saragih, *et al.*, 2023). This program is regulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture with the main aim of broadening students' knowledge, skills and learning experiences outside their own campus environment (Sormin, *et al.*, 2023). Besides that, this program launched to improve graduates' abilities in *soft skills* and *hard skills* so that they are better prepared to face global challenges (Anggraini, *et al.*, 2022; Sinaga, *et al.*, 2023; Susilawati, 2021).

The Merdeka Student Exchange Program (PMM) allows students to take lectures outside the island where their home university is located, for one full semester (Wijayanto, *et al.*, 2023). In this context, PMM not only reaches students from state universities, but also private ones, covering all students from Sabang to Merauke (Pasaribu, *et al.*, 2023). In its implementation, PMM recognizes and allocates semester credit units (SKS) for all courses taken at recipient universities (Buku Panduan Pelaksanaan Program PMM, 2024; Nainggolan, 2021). PMM students can take up to 16 credits of general courses and 4 credits of the Nusantara Module at college recipients, which gives them the flexibility to choose courses in the same study program and outside the study program according to their personal interests and desires (Gulo, *et al.*, 2023; Pardede, *et al.*, 2023).

Program offers a variety of opportunities, however there are several challenges faced by participants. One of the main challenges is the selection of cross-major courses which do not always suit students' interests and abilities. This happens because several elective courses offered at the receiving university have been programmed by the student at their home university. So, it is natural that some students tend to choose courses across majors to fulfill their credit obligations (Hutabarat & Sinaga, 2023). Additionally, some students are

interested in trying new things by taking courses outside their scientific discipline, which ultimately presents its own challenges and benefits for PMM participants.

This cross-department lecture is actually able to enrich knowledge outside the scientific field of each student's study program (Siboro & Hutabarat, 2023). Academic challenges such as difficulties in understanding new material and adapting to different teaching methods become part of the learning process that strengthens students' analytical abilities and problem-solving skills. Therefore, looking at the existing problems, the aim of this research is to explore Biology Education students' perceptions of the benefits and challenges they experience when taking cross-major courses in the Independent Student Exchange Program at Muhammadiyah University of Malang. This research is important to understand the extent to which the program is effective in achieving its goals and how students can maximize the benefits gained from this cross-major experience.

METHOD

Type Study

The research approach used in this article is a qualitative descriptive approach. This approach was chosen to understand in depth the students' experiences in participating in the Independent Student Exchange Program (PMM).

Location and Time Study

The research was conducted in February after the announcement of the final semester exam scores. Data was collected online using *Google Form*, allowing participation from PMM students spread geographically across various universities in Indonesia.

Instrument Study

The instrument used is an open questionnaire, which is designed to allow respondents to provide answers freely without certain choice restrictions. This approach provides flexibility for respondents to express their experiences in more depth (Nasution & Sutapa, 2020).

Subject Study

The subjects of this research were five Biology Education students who had participated in the Independent Student Exchange Program. Subject selection was based on their participation in the program and their ability to provide relevant insights regarding the benefits and challenges they experienced.

Technique Data collection

Data was collected by filling out questionnaires by PMM students via *Google Form*. Previously, the researcher asked respondents for permission and explained the purpose of filling out the questionnaire to ensure that each answer reflected their situation and conditions when carrying out cross-department lectures while participating in the Independent Student Exchange program.

Technique Data analysis

The collected data is processed using the *Google Docs document platform*, which automatically produces descriptions of the answers to questions filled in by respondents. Analysis is carried out by reading and understanding all the answers to group them based on the main themes that emerge. Identification of relevant patterns is used to answer research questions in more depth.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Muhammadiyah University of Malang (UMM) is one of the recipient universities in the Independent Student Exchange (PMM) program. A total of 220 students from various universities came from outside Java was successful passed the PMM3 selection at UMM. Although students have the freedom to choose courses across majors or not choose up to 16 credits. However, students usually choose several study programs that match their major at their home university, then choose several courses across majors that they are interested in (Jufri & Harfiani, 2024). The results of the distribution of cross-major subject selection questionnaires that have been carried out are detailed as follows.

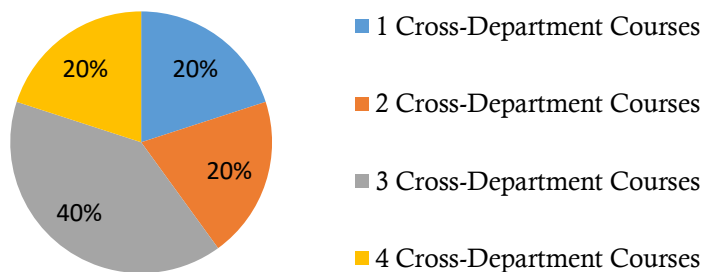


Figure 1 . Percentage Chart Number of Cross-Department Courses for PMM Participants

The survey results show variations in the number of courses across majors taken by students participating in the Independent

Student Exchange Program at Muhammadiyah University of Malang. The majority of respondents chose 3 cross-major

courses, reaching 40%, while 20% chose 1, 2, and 4 cross-major courses respectively. This variation reflects the diversity of students' interests and learning needs in exploring various disciplines, including some who take courses from several different faculties.

Among the various courses that respondents successfully participated in, there were varying degrees of continuity between the courses taken during take part in the Independent Student Exchange program with their major at their home university, for example, one of the respondents took courses at the agricultural faculty. As students with biology education majors who took cross-major courses in agriculture during the student exchange program, they felt that the material studied still had strong relevance to their original major. Although there are differences in focus between the two disciplines. While attending cross-major lectures, they have gained valuable practical experience in agriculture, which has enriched their insight into the real application of biological concepts in daily agricultural practice.

Apart from that, there were also respondents who stated that some courses had continuity, while others did not. Some even stated that there were no continuous courses at all, while some stated that even though there were differences, the knowledge they gained was still useful without harming them. Several respondents expressed that although there are some courses that may look very different from their original major, they can still find connections with their original field of study. This is in accordance with research by Putra, *et al.*, (2024) which shows that the skills and knowledge obtained from cross-disciplinary courses can provide new insights and increase competence in students' main fields of study.

This shows that continuity does not always have to be immediate, but can be identified through a broader perspective or through practical application of the knowledge learned. From these various answers, although

there are variations in the level of continuity between cross-major courses taken during the Independent Student Exchange program and the original major, this experience still provides added value for students in terms of developing cross-disciplinary knowledge and understanding. This is relevant to research (Sormin, *et al.*, 2023) which states that the PMM program allows students to develop their knowledge through cross-major courses which provide freedom in exploring knowledge at their target university.

Benefit Lectures Cross Major

Biology Education students who take courses across departments in the Independent Student Exchange program receive benefits in the form of gaining new perspectives and different approaches from their home campus. They recognize that studying a field that is unfamiliar to them can make a diverse contribution to broadening students' academic horizons, both through practical experience in the laboratory, expanding their understanding of various concepts and methods in new disciplines, and developing relevant practical skills. in the academic and professional world. Through this experience, students can combine the knowledge they learn from the perspectives of different disciplines, thereby increasing added value for themselves (Siboro & Hutabarat, 2023).

Of course, there are many other benefits that students can obtain when taking cross-department lectures on the Independent Student Exchange program at the Muhammadiyah University of Malang. Apart from gaining new knowledge from various majors, students can also develop adaptability and flexibility in dealing with diverse academic environments. This experience can also enrich students' learning experiences by providing opportunities to carry out practicums or cross-disciplinary research projects. This can strengthen students' practical skills and provide

valuable experience to be applied in the world of work in the future (Putri, *et al.*, 2023).

This program is also considered to make a positive contribution to the development of other skills, such as the ability to face challenges, take responsibility and adapt to different environments. Practical experience, such as in computer graphics courses, is very useful for developing participants' soft skills. Thus, this exchange program not only provides a valuable learning experience, but also plays a role in forming important interpersonal skills for participants in facing future challenges. This is relevant to previous research that the Independent Student Exchange (PMM) and Independent Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) programs have improved students' soft skills and competencies, as well as provided useful knowledge and skills after graduation (Gusdini, *et al.*, 2022; Opti & Rachmawati, 2022; Sulistiyani, *et al.*, 2021). In this context, the cross-department approach in the Independent Student Exchange program at Muhammadiyah University of Ma'lang helps strengthen these findings by providing direct experience that supports the development of *soft skills*, additional knowledge, and readiness to face future challenges.

Challenge Lectures Cross Major

Of course, cross-major lectures that students take part in do not always run smoothly, of course there will always be challenges they face. Based on the answers from several respondents, it appears that there are academic challenges they face related to the level of difficulty of the courses or teaching methods that are different from what they usually experience at their home universities. Some students expressed that they faced difficulties in understanding material that was quite different from what they usually studied. Apart from that, there are also those who experience difficulties in certain courses because they don't really understand the

concepts, even though they can still take part in the learning (Hutabarat & Sinaga, 2023).

On the other hand, some students stated that they did not experience difficulties with teaching methods in general, but faced challenges in several courses that had different concepts. Several respondents also highlighted the challenges of dealing with academic procedures that are different from those at their home campus, such as taking courses at a higher level without getting a basic understanding of the material first. These challenges often require extra effort from students to adapt and find ways to understand the material well.

Apart from academic challenges, students also face social and cultural adaptation challenges, especially when they have to interact with a new environment that may have different norms and habits. Limited access to academic resources such as textbooks, laboratories, or special software is also an obstacle. Research Bisri, *et al.* (2023) shows that limited access to academic resources can hinder the student learning process, especially in the context of cross-institutional learning. Curriculum differences between universities origin and university receiver height often causes confusion and requires additional adjustments. According to a study conducted by Sari, *et al.* (2022), curriculum misalignment can have a negative impact on students' academic adaptation, which requires more effort in understanding unfamiliar material.

The use of language in the learning process is also a challenge for PMM program participants. If the language commonly used at the home university is different from that at the receiving university, this can increase difficulties in understanding lecture material and participating in discussions. Technical and logistical challenges also pose challenges, such as differences in class times and internet connectivity problems for online lectures. Academic and administrative support varies

between colleges origin and university The recipient's height can add to the difficulties , as can the mental and emotional stress that students may feel when adapting to a new academic environment. Lastly, time management becomes a challenge in itself when you have to adjust the lecture schedule, assignments and module activities archipelago at college receiver height .

From the various answers, it can be seen that the experience of taking cross-department lectures on the Independent Student Exchange program at Muhammadiyah University of Malang does not always go smoothly for every student. This is relevant to the study conducted by Nabuasa & Blegur (2022) showing that the problem in the PMM program is the lack of variety in learning methods and the lack of collaboration between students and lecturers, which causes reduced motivation to learn. The challenges faced by students in the PMM program are information incompatibility, difficulties in academic adaptation, and language barriers And culture (Jufri & Harfiani, 2024).

Evaluation Overall Exchange Program Success Student Independent

In general, the assessment of the success of the Independent Student exchange program is very positive. Most respondents stated that the program was very successful, with some even calling it almost perfect. This assessment of success is based on various factors, such as the grade point average (GPA) or final results obtained by students, as well as the experiences they experience while undergoing the Independent Student Exchange program (Jufri & Harfiani, 2024; Putra *et al.*, 2024) .

However, there are some who state that this program has not fully achieved its success as originally planned. However, the majority of respondents concluded that the program provides a quality experience for students, with a long-term impact on their personal development. Thus, although there are still

aspects that need to be improved, the Independent Student Exchange program has provided a significant positive impact for its participants.

CONCLUSION

The research results show that the independent student exchange program has a significant impact on the participants, broadening their academic horizons beyond the scope of regular courses, facilitating cross-department learning, improving interpersonal skills, and providing valuable experiences not obtained at the home campus. Despite facing challenges such as understanding different material, adapting to new teaching methods, different academic procedures, time constraints, and interactions with various lecturers and students, this program was considered successful and positive in the academic and personal development of participants. This research confirms that student exchange programs have significant value in enriching the higher education experience of Biology Education students, as well as making an important contribution to the advancement of science through broader and more diverse learning.

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