# Diversity of interpretation in responding to the independent policy of learning-Independent campus during the COVID-19 pandemic

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***Abstract***---This study examines the diversity of interpretations of the implementation of the independent learning policy applied in higher education after the outbreak of COVID-19 in Indonesia. In the process of implementing Independent Learning through the Independent Campus, higher education faces many obstacles, ranging from the low quality of human resources (lecturers/students) to the lack of supporting infrastructure such as internet network disturbances and other information technology. This research is library research. This type of research is qualitative. Data were collected from primary and secondary documents. The findings of this study are: first, several higher education institutions have implemented government policies; second, the implementation of independent learning is not measurable, resulting in a diversity of interpretations among implementing agents; third, the main obstacle to the implementation of independent learning is the lack of support from human resources, both human resources and non-human resources. The findings in this study contribute to the study of public policy disciplines, especially related to the implementation of the independent campus policy.

**Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic that has hit Indonesia has had a serious impact on many sectors, including the world of education(Sarnoto, 2022). The fundamental changes between before and after Pandemic, in fact, can be summarized in a single learning concept called "free learning". The concept of Independent Learning was launched by the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, Nadiem Anwar Makarim, with the hope of being able to bring education to be more advanced and better. The concept of Independent Learning provides space and opportunity for educational institutions to explore the potential of students as much as possible, by adjusting to the interests, talents, tendencies of each student. It is hoped that this independence and freedom of learning will be able to bring a positive contribution to the world of education and the progress of the nation and state(Sarnoto, Sastradiharja, & Mansur, 2022).

One of the arguments that the learning model that took place during this pandemic is judged to be in accordance with the principle of "Freedom of Learning" is the demand for the world of education to adapt and adopt technological developments in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0. The rapid development of technology and information cannot be avoided by teachers, lecturers, or educators in general. The combination of learning methods and technology to help students / students is a basic need. For this reason, learning innovation in the 4.0 era has emphasized the mastery of completely new learning methods, demanding the maximization of potential, including mastery of technology in the learning process(Sarnoto et al., 2021). This kind of thing can be witnessed directly in higher education which carries the concept of "Independent Campus" as an extension/implementation of the concept of "Freedom of Learning". At this "independent campus", higher education is required to be able to produce outputs who are able to have various kinds of knowledge and skills, so that students are not nervous to enter the world of work, are not inferior to machines, and are still able to control machines (Siregar, Sahirah, & Harahap, 2020).

A study conducted by Susanti Saragih, et al., shows the readiness of lecturers and students to adopt the latest technology in their learning methods, arguing that students have personal skills in using technology and have high motivation to study online during this pandemic. Likewise with lecturers, they not only master technology but also encourage themselves to continuously use technology in their effective learning. This research is quite based because it was conducted on 1036 students and 354 lecturers from various higher education institutions in Indonesia (Saragih, Markus, Rhian, & Setiawan, 2021).

However, the independence policy learned from the government did not leave problems. At the implementation stage, there were many unsolved obstacles. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Religion received critical attention from observers, and were considered not to have taken into account the

diverse characteristics of regions in Indonesia. Distance Learning (PJJ) which is expected to be realized by utilizing the latest technological developments is hampered by the low human resources of students (Sarnoto, 2021). The students found it difficult to access education, the poor quality of the internet network, and the local government seemed slow in overcoming problems in their territory because they were still waiting for initiatives from the central government. In addition, with the COVID-19 pandemic (Azzahra, 2020). The aspect of infrastructure development that is not evenly distributed in all corners of the country is the strongest reason to see the weakness of the implementation of the concept of independent learning (Sarnoto, Sastradiharja, Mansur, & Hikmah, 2022).

In general, the diversity of interpretations in implementing the policy of independent learning at independent campuses is not uniform and not simple, especially for higher education which faces financial, infrastructure, geographical, administrative, human resources and other non-human resources constraints. This research raises the topic of "diversity of interpretations of the implementation of the independent study-independent campus policy during the COVID-19 pandemic," to see further why the government policy implementation process did not run smoothly and how to overcome all the obstacles that arise, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. This research is expected to contribute to the formulation of problems in the field and problem solving in the context of implementing the independent policy of learning from the government.

**Methods**

This type of research is library research, which uses library sources to obtain primary data in this study. For this reason, the research data is limited to library collection materials, without the need for field research (Zed, 2008).  Books, journals, magazines, and news content related to the implementation of the independent learning concept at an independent campus became the main information for analysis. In collecting, sorting, and analyzing library materials, the approach used in this research is the policy implementation approach, where implementation itself is one of the five stages of public policy, in addition to planning, formulating, leading, and controlling. Implementation is carried out after a plan has been prepared and formulated(Nugroho, 2003). For this reason, after the concept of independent learning was implemented into an independent campus practice, it was at that time that this research focused on its analysis.

Implementation theory is very diverse, one of which is the classical theory of the Van Meter and Van Horn models. This classic implementation model was introduced in 1975, which emphasizes implementation analysis that highlights six variables: first, the goals or targets of a policy must be clear so as not to cause a variety of interpretations that trigger conflicts among implementing agents; policies need to be supported by resources; communication between organizations and strengthening activities in various cases; the characteristics of implementing agents must provide support for policy implementation, including how public opinion exists in the community; social conditions that support public implementation; and the disposition of the implementor must be maximal, both

related to cognition, the intensity of the disposition, and the response of the implementor (Sarnoto, 2012).

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

## Results and Discussions

### Readiness of higher education to implement the policy

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

The manual above also talks about quality assurance, starting from preparing quality policies and manuals, determining quality, carrying out monitoring and evaluation (monev) which includes assessment principles, assessment aspects and assessment procedures. In formulating quality policies, higher education is required to formulate policies in an integrated manner with higher education quality assurance; referring to the quality policy and manual; and socialized especially to supervisors, industrial supervisors, and apprentices. Regarding the quality determination process, the quality for the independent campus includes: participant competence, implementation, internal-external mentoring process, suggestions and infrastructure for implementation, reporting and presentation of results, and quality assessment (Sarnoto, Rahmawati, & Hidayat, 2022).

Meanwhile, in terms of monitoring and evaluation, implementation must be carried out starting from the preparation, implementation, and assessment stages. Assessment or evaluation should focus on individual students, to provide information about what abilities students have achieved. The principle of evaluating the Independent Learning Independent Campus policy refers to five

principles; educative, authentic, objective, accountable, and transparent. Aspects assessed include: attendance during debriefing and implementation, discipline and responsibility in carrying out tasks, attitude, ability to carry out tasks and make task reports. The assessment procedure must be carried out by means of observation, carried out at the end of the program, and by a facilitator from a third party to provide information about what abilities students have achieved. The principle of evaluating the Independent Learning Independent Campus policy refers to five principles; educative, authentic, objective, accountable, and transparent. Aspects assessed include: attendance during debriefing and implementation, discipline and responsibility in carrying out tasks, attitude, ability to carry out tasks and make task reports. The assessment procedure must be carried out by means of observation, carried out at the end of the program, and by a facilitator from a third party to provide information about what abilities students have achieved (Sarnoto, Sastradiharja, Mansur, et al., 2022).

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**Diversity of interpretation of the policy of independent learning**

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

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

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

Another criticism and interpretation was conveyed by academician Luthfi T. Dzulfikar, alumni of Gadjah Mada University, Erasmus+Undergrad Exchange Program Carlos III University Madrid, who said that the Independent Campus policy package contained four points of change, including those related to accreditation and the opening of study programs. The new program, which is expected to bridge the gap between the university and the professional world, does not contain a clause that guarantees students' freedom of expression. In fact, according to Luthfi T. Dzulfikar, the latest report from the LOkataru Foundation Legal Organization noted that since 2015 there have been 110 students who have received sanctions from the campus for being involved in demonstrations. Reflecting on his education at Wayne State University, United States (Dzulfikar, 2020).

**Low resource support from the government**

In the theory of public policy implementation, the support of these resources greatly influences the successful implementation of a policy or program. However, in a state of limited resource support, the service will not run optimally(Sarnoto & Hayatina, 2021). In the context of the implementation of the Independent Learning-Independent Campus, another obstacle that also arises is the low support of resources from the government for higher education. So far, the Ministry of Education and Culture has collaborated with the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Center in Indonesia to support the Independent Learning-Independent Campus policy. One of them is making changes to the learning approach, from what was originally a "teaching base" to "students centers". Students and students become the center of attention and play a more active role, while teachers and lecturers act more as facilitators and mediators. Other assistance and support include: strengthening program instructors/teachers, digital connectivity, world-class research collaboration (Kemendikbud, 2021).

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

is uneven due to administrative completeness constraints, and this disbursement will continue in 2022 (Warliani & Fauziyyah, 2020).

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

**Conclusion**

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

In addition to the technical problems, there are also philosophical problems. The concept of Independent Learning-Independent Campus at the philosophical level is considered not holistic, even contrary to the spirit of independence. Some consider that the concept of independent learning does not contain a single clause that guarantees student freedom. Other parties consider that the concept of independent learning is even more demanding and implements rules so that the campus is not completely independent. Because of this philosophical constraint, the derivative is a technical constraint. Thus, the results and findings in this study contribute to the discipline of management, especially in the field of public policy implementation.

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