

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background

To improve the quality of education and produce superior graduates from tertiary institutions, the Minister of Education and Culture, Research and Technology has issued the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* since 2020. The main aim of this policy is to increase the competency of graduates, both in terms of soft skills and hard skills by giving students the freedom to choose courses according to their interests to ensure that they are better prepared and relevant to the changing needs of the times (Tohir, 2020). The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) has eight forms of learning activities that are in line with the tri-dharma of higher education, namely education, research, and community service. The eight forms of learning activities include (1) student exchange, (2) internship/work practice, (3) teaching assistance in educational units, (4) research, (5) humanitarian projects, (6) entrepreneurial activities, (7) studies /independent projects, and (8) building thematic villages/KKN. With the existence of various forms of *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* activities, it can be a challenge for every higher education institution to be able to prepare a generation that is superior and ready to face every change but doesn't forget to instill the cultural values of the Indonesian nation (Soeharso, 2021).

Higher education as an institution allows students to develop hard skills and soft skills so that they are ready to enter the world of work after completing their studies. However, a large number of university graduates have difficulty fulfilling job information requirements due to a lack of knowledge, professional experience,

and inadequate skills needed for the world of work due to a lack of collaboration between Academic Institutions (Purwanti, 2021). By implementing MBKM, universities can produce skilled and competent graduates who are in line with developments in science and technology and the demands of the world of work.

As part of the English Education Study Program at Artha Wacana Christian University, fifth-semester students must select certain courses and subsequently complete an internship program related to those courses. The students in question numbered 40 people who have completed their internship program as part of their fifth-semester curriculum. The courses taken and then converted into internships include (1) Media and Communication, (2) Metode Penelitian Bahasa, (3) Linguistic Software, (4) language Documentation Project, (5) Content Design, (6) Project on Journalism, (7) Kapita Selektu Linguistik, (8) dan Broadcasting. From September 4 to December 15, 2023, these students participated in their internship activities at various locations, including the *Unit Bahasa & Budaya, Hotel Kristal, UPTD Museum, Taman Budaya, Kantor Bahasa NTT, Auscan School, Media Pos Kupang, Radio FKM Kupang, RRI Kupang, and Christian Montessori School*. During this internship, students have the opportunity to improve their soft skills and prepare themselves to face the challenges of higher education, thereby ultimately producing quality graduates who can compete at national and international levels (Surtikanti, 2022).

This study emphasizes the importance of soft skills, which encompass abilities, traits, and attitudes related to personality rather than just formal or technical knowledge. While many students today prioritize hard skills and academic achievements, soft skills are often more critical in the workplace. High academic grades are less beneficial if individuals struggle with communication, adaptation, and other interpersonal skills. Research by the Carnegie Foundation and the

Stanford Research Center in the United States found that 85% of career success is attributed to soft skills, while only 15% is due to hard skills. Although technical skills are necessary in the professional world, soft skills such as stronger work motivation, adaptability, responsiveness to change, effective communication, and high integrity are crucial for career longevity and success (Kusumaningrum et al., 2022). Consequently, this study aims to explore students' perceptions of soft skills development, focusing on seven key areas: Communicative skills, Critical thinking and problem-solving skills, Teamwork skills, Lifelong learning and information management skills, Entrepreneurial skills, Ethics, Morals and professionalism, and Leadership skills (Sharma 2009).

From the explanation above, this research aims to determine student perceptions of soft skills development through the MBKM Program for English language education students. This research specifically focus on Fifth-semester students who take part in internship activities for MBKM package courses in organizations or companies that have collaborative relationships.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

To clarify the problems of Fifth-semester students of the English department regarding the student's perception of soft skill development, as explained above with the following problem formulation: “What are the student perceptions on the soft skill development through Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program of 5<sup>th</sup>-semester English student”.

## **1.3 Aim of Study**

Based on the formulated problems, this study aims to “Describe students' perceptions on the soft skill development through Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program of 5<sup>th</sup>-semester English students”.

## **1.4 Significance of Study**

### **1.4.1 Implication**

The result of the study is expected to support and enrich the theory about the MBKM Program to increase the development of soft skills by Rahman, et al (2022) and by Rahmawanti & Nurzaelani (2022) about the impact of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) to improve students' soft skills and hard skills.

### **1.4.2 Application**

It is hoped that the research results that have been described can contribute both theoretically and practically, as follows:

1. Theoretically, the researcher hopes that this research can be useful for the world of education, especially in improving soft skills by participating in MBKM activities which are a source of learning and development activities or increasing one's competence.

2. Practically, researchers hope that this research can be useful for:

- a. 5<sup>th</sup> semester students of the English department

This research will help students know and understand what is needed to develop the soft skills of English Department students through the MBKM program.

- b. Other researchers

This research will be useful for researchers to conduct further research on this matter. Impact of the MBKM Program on soft skills development. Apart from that, researchers can also evaluate, revise, reconstruct, or modify this research and conduct similar research with different forms.