

# **Kampus Merdeka: Providing Meaningful Engagement in a Disruptive World**

**Adam Voak**  
**James Cook University**

**Brian Fairman**  
**James Cook University**

**Abdullah Helmy**  
**Politeknik Negri Malang**

**Anggi Afriansyah**  
**National Research and Innovation Agency**

*The Kampus Merdeka policy initiative aims to reframe the pedagogical intent linking engagement with industry and civil society, while transforming and freeing the Indonesian education sector from the one size fits all educational pedagogy of the past. Thus, Kampus Merdeka, on one level, can be seen as freeing the learners to develop an educational experience that matches their individual needs, whilst others may view this policy initiative as embedding the ‘industrialization’ of education into the mainstream, promoting industry requirements over personal development (Kodrat, 2021). That said, there are notable concerns regarding the ability and capacity of educational institutes to implement this major policy shift under Kampus Merdeka. This research conducted semi-structured individual interviews around the issues and concerns expressed by academic staff as they attempt to take their first tentative steps towards meaningful engagement in work-integrated learning programs.*

*Keywords: Kampus Merdeka, industry engagement, work-integrated learning, emancipated learning*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In early 2020, the Indonesian Government launched a policy initiative for the higher education sector titled ‘Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka-MBKM’ (Freedom to Learn-Independent Campus). More colloquially, the Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim described this policy shift as ‘emancipated learning’ (Neumann, 2021). This interpretation of Kampus Merdeka by the Minister involves ‘removing the tyranny of a single textbook and tailoring learning to the individual’ (Neumann, 2021). This program also aims to accelerate innovation by aligning higher education to the world of industry by providing tertiary students with work-related competencies via work-integrated internships, industry research, and engaging in community service (Amalia, 2021), challenging educational providers to innovate and businesses and companies to offer ‘university course units’ in their workplaces.

Kampus Merdeka is a paradigm shift and one giant leap forward in bundling higher education with industry (Neumann, 2021) for Indonesian educational provision, and aims to encourage learning by acquiring the knowledge, skills, and attributes required in the workplace (Purwanti, 2021). Businesses will be allowed to deliver university qualifications in their workplaces based on the needs of their industry, allowing them to design the content, conduct the programs and award the qualifications (Neumann, 2021). Building stronger community and industry engagement is at the heart of Kampus Merdeka, particularly in community service programs (Prahani et al., 2020), but this vision of a learner-centered education framework and a work-integrated learning approach has raised concerns across the Indonesian educational community. The initiative has been described as the industrialization of education (Kodrat, 2021) and as a revolution in educational oppression (Prahani et al., 2020). These positions illustrate the sharp polarization in attitudes and views regarding this debate, and the implication of this program requires a more detailed analysis. This paper attempts to look more closely at ‘Kampus Merdeka’ by asking three key questions: (i) How well prepared is the university sector and the academic community for MBKM reforms; (ii) What issues does this raise for university administration and management; and (iii) How can ‘engagement’ between education and industry become more meaningful? The degree to which educational institutions can respond to this paradigm shift will largely depend upon their human resource capacity, levels of institutional acceptance and resourcing, and the ability to engage with a new way of meeting student learner needs (Purwanti, 2021).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research utilized a constructivist approach (Murphy, 1997). Constructionism connotes a socially constructed reality that is experienced at a particular place and time (Neuman, 2006). This approach enabled the authors to develop a theoretical, yet socially constructed account of the respondent’s views on industry engagement. The authors adopted an interpretive research process that allowed for the subjective meanings used in social interaction to inform and detail each respondent’s institute’s engagement practices. To this end, data were collected using purposive sampling methods through semi-structured interviews with 10 key senior stakeholders in Universities and Vocational Institutes (Currie, 2009). Whilst the authors acknowledge that the sample size is small, an inductive and deductive approach to data analysis to ascertain the emergence of critical issues is important in this instance. Inductive methods enabled the authors to move from specific situational analysis to more generalized learning, while deductive methods enabled us to use generalized knowledge to gain specific insights into the relevant issues. Utilizing these approaches to data analysis removes preconceptions, remains open, and trusts in the emergence of concepts from the data. The key steps in data analysis included data reduction, data coding, thematic analysis, and interpretation (Babbie, 2013).

The application of purposive sampling technique applies judgment in the selection of interviewees with a specific purpose in mind (W Lawrence, 2014) and uses a deliberate choice of a participant based on the qualities which the participant possesses (Etikan et al., 2016; Neuman L W, 2014; W Lawrence, 2014). This investigation targeted senior University and Institute staff with executive oversight and operational carriage for the implementation of Kampus Merdeka engagement strategies at their Institution. Etikan et al. (2016) point to the benefits of this sampling methodology, suggesting that this “non-random technique does not need underlying theories or a set number of participants” and enables the “selection of individuals or groups of individuals that are proficient and well-informed with a phenomenon of interest.”

## **FREEDOM TO LEARN THROUGH KAMPUS MERDEKA**

The Kampus Merdeka policy introduced under the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation, No 3/2020 on National Standards of Higher Education, aims to improve the quality of education for university graduates by giving them greater freedoms to learn and to improve graduate employability (Purwanti, 2021). The Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, described Kampus Merdeka as a ground-breaking attempt to provide greater autonomy to educational institutions by empowering them to remove

bureaucratization (Prahani et al., 2020). This policy shift in higher education across Indonesia offers numerous opportunities for academic staff, university students, institutes, organizations, industry, and communities to reinvigorate individual learning and focus on internationalizing their educational provision. Not all universities in Indonesia are equally prepared for this transformational change, and it is anticipated that those institutes that can establish networks and collaboration with industry and the community will improve student employment outcomes (Purwanti, 2021). It is hoped that Universities across the archipelago that are responding to this major shift in educational provision, will not only improve student outcomes but will advance their international reputation (Purwanti, 2021).

The international polemics around the role of education in society remains contested; indeed the Kampus Merdeka policy has brought these tensions of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity to the surface (Lhutfi & Mardiani, 2020). Prahani (2020) suggests that the purpose of Kampus Merdeka is creating a learning culture that is innovative, less restrictive, and highly responsive to individual learner needs, giving students the freedom to actively construct their knowledge through real-life experiences (Yulianto et al., 2022). Kampus Merdeka will play a significant role in building human capability and global competence while inculcating the Pancasila values of noble action, and independent critical and cooperative thought (Perdana et al., 2021). Latif (2018) notes that Pancasila was formulated to serve as a guiding and unifying national ontological values framework. The five principles (*sila*) aim to synthesize the diversity of beliefs, understandings, and hopes that underpin Indonesia's ongoing development. They consist of:

- (i) divinity
- (ii) humanity
- (iii) unity
- (iv) democracy
- (v) justice (Dewantara et al., 2019)

According to Latif (2014), the *sila* precept is a synthetic formulation of all understandings of socioeconomic justice (Latif, 2014). The Pancasila principles are directed at the common good to achieve independence, unity, sovereignty, justice, and prosperity (Latif, 2018). These principles have also been expressed in the preamble to the Indonesian Constitution, which elucidates the recognition of the people of Indonesia and the adherence to democratic principles. The principle of just and civilized humanity in Latif's view (2011) is the vision of the Indonesian nation in anticipating the challenges of globalization (Latif, 2011). Nanggala and Suryadi (2021) opined that it may be necessary to strengthen student citizenship competencies, through civil-education programs. They promulgate that, with strong student citizenship competencies, the state can rely on students to realize social justice goals (Nanggala & Suryadi, 2021).

Pancasila provides a typology for examining the impact of Kampus Merdeka. The researchers posit that examining Pancasila in the context of Kampus Merdeka may prove beneficial in understanding the preconditions and the 'raison d'etre' for Kampus Merdeka. Healey suggests the value of such a typology is that it makes the world easier to understand (Healey, 2015). This typology may embrace several pedagogical pillars, including notions of; nation-building, social cohesion, economic development, skills innovation, social development, and sustainability. Nanggala and Suryadi (2021) argue that the realization of citizenship education in the learning practice of the Kampus Merdeka program is carried out through several activities that directly interact with the community. These include research, entrepreneurship, humanitarian projects, independent projects, or even building villages. However, Nanggala and Suryadi (2021) also note those efforts to realize citizenship education in respect of the Kampus Merdeka initiatives, require the involvement of several parties, including the government, academia, the community or society, the private sector, and the media (Nanggala & Suryadi, 2021).

Prahani (2020) also noted that the intention behind Kampus Merdeka is to bring a 'realization' of Paulo Freire's 'freedom education model,' within which education is expected to produce changes in students and society (Prahani et al., 2020). This is a view shared by the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarim, who described Kampus Merdeka as 'emancipated learning,' akin to the principles of the founding fathers of Indonesia and their desire to 'emancipate' Indonesia from their colonial past (Neumann, 2021). Freire's contribution to raising the consciousness of the poor and promoting participatory and indigenous skill development was a revolution in educational provision (Freire, 1993). Equating Kampus Merdeka's

vision and stated intention to make this consciousness-raising possible, is a giant leap forward, and indeed is a path that the Government of Indonesia is wholeheartedly embracing (Yuhastina et al., 2020). Aligning this vision with civil societies' current views, and the traditional community view of the role of education, remains problematic, and thus the Government of Indonesia has some challenges in socializing this paradigm shift (Krishnapatria, 2021). That said, the notion of 'indigenous' skill development as expressed in Kampus Merdeka is a programmatically more desirable one than providing outside knowledge (Bennell, 1999; Foley, 2004). Kodrat (2021) hypothesizes that education under the Kampus Merdeka program focuses on the development of skillful workers as opposed to character and personality building as defined in Bill 20, 2003 of National Education (Kodrat, 2021).

The incorporation of community projects as one of a possible eight MBKM strategies opens the path for innovative creative entrepreneurial activity aligned with community needs, which include social projects such as empowering people in rural and remote areas to build the local economy, infrastructure, and human resources (Prahani et al., 2020). Similarly, in a survey of student's selection of off-campus learning activities conducted by Fitriyani et al. (2020), 78% of the students surveyed chose to teach in programs at the high school level as this was seen as the right time to instill a spirit of nationalism and love for the country (Fitriyani et al., 2020). Further, encouraging a creative mindset in students which is attuned to community needs, involves innovation in their approaches to solving problems, and is more aptly attuned to real-world life experiences, is a path that ensures appropriate skills development (Maipita et al., 2021). Indeed, achieving independent learning, together with the development of critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration skills, is the challenge before Indonesian higher education institutions. This will require them to modify their existing programs and move into providing adaptive and independent study programs. (Yulianto et al., 2022)

This dichotomy between developing skillful workers and building character presents significant challenges for Islamic scholars as they negotiate educational independence and capability requirements in the real world (Zulfikar, 2019). The Islamic perspective is that education should develop student's thoughts and attitudes (Asy-syakhsiyah Al Islamiyyah), therefore government programs in education should focus on developing the spiritual dimensions of Shiddiq (Honesty), Amah (Trustworthiness), Tabligh (Communication skills) and Fathonah (Entrepreneurial abilities) (Nugroho et al., 2021). Nugroho et al. also opined that the Kampus Merdeka curriculum requires the development of a New Model of Spiritual Preneurship which integrates these four spiritual dimensions into the learning programs at higher education to meet the needs of industry, community, and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 (Nugroho et al., 2021). This New Model of Spiritual Preneurship according to Nugroho et al. (2021) is character-based education used to transform students into entrepreneurs who become critical for the social development of the community. Kondrat (2021) suggests that Kampus Merdeka does not follow this Islamic perspective of education (Kodrat, 2021), and other Islamic scholars, including Priatmoko and Dzakiyyah (2020), opined that the Islamic view expresses the importance of 'learning output' as a means of gaining closeness to God as revealed in the Holy Quran (Priatmoko & Dzakiyyah, 2020).

Articulating the tensions that exist between developing individual competence in thoughts and standards and developing skillful workers is a task before many Indonesian academics and educationalists (Fairman Voak 2023). This paper explores the impact of Kampus Merdeka on institutions as they 'engage' with the community and industry. Respondents have shared their experiences with us of the benefits and challenges of this agenda, suggesting subtle improvements in program implementation.

## **ENGAGING WITH INDUSTRY FROM THE UNIVERSITY PERSPECTIVE**

Cooperation with businesses and industry is rather problematic for some Indonesian higher education institutes, as there are very few industries in Indonesia that have Research and Development departments. This means that, as noted here by one respondent; 'Not many industries have a budget for research, [thus] we have less than 10 researchers working with Industry.' Defrizal et al. (2022) posit that a critical success factor of Kampus Merdeka will be the ability of the higher education sector to build and establish important cooperation and collaborations with the business world (Defrizal et al., 2022). Many of the challenges of

implementing Kampus Merdeka relate to the ability of Institutes to embrace change and encourage engagement. In this respect, Kampus Merdeka requires institutes to be innovative and creative in their engagement (Amalia, 2021), but, that said, some University staff have experiences that are quite perplexing. One respondent was exasperated with the approach used by his institution, stating that ‘when individual academics bring their industry networks to the University they are not rewarded’ for this engagement. It was their view that institutions need to reward individuals prepared to engage and network with industry, as well as develop other innovations that can work comprehensively to optimize the successful adoption of Kampus Merdeka (Perdana et al., 2021).

Perkmann et al. (2021) argue that the motivations for possible engagement in academic research with industry, are driven primarily by autonomous individual characteristics, and less by University proclamations (Perkmann et al., 2021). Perkmann et al. noted that it is the individual entrepreneurial academic who is making inroads into the industry, in which case University proclamations and university management securing and managing partner relationships may prove less productive. Nonetheless, another respondent lamented that ‘we need to establish better ‘cooperation’ with industry at the institute level’ whilst posing the question - ‘How?’ Indeed, how to engage with industry remains elusive, not just for Indonesian Universities but more globally, for example in the higher education sector in Australia, where there is little impact on innovation, human capital development and productivity (Bean, 2021). In Indonesia, Universities and vocational providers have for some time engaged with industry, but this has met with mixed success, as institutes and industry do not always share the same understanding and engagement is not always mutually beneficial when expressed this way, as commented by one of the respondents:

*‘We need the industry, but I am not sure the industry needs us..., industry needs our graduates but it’s not a mutual relationship. We cannot provide them with profit this makes it difficult for us to get close to the companies.*

This lack of mutual benefit in the relationship, according to this respondent, skews the relationship toward an unequal exchange. In these circumstances, understanding the divergent cultures of both organizations makes building trust and forming deeper relationships with the industry, complex and challenging (Fairman et al., 2020). The Kampus Merdeka vision for educational institutions needs to work towards continuous collaboration, and the building of sustainable partnerships with relevant industries (Mahmood et al., 2021), and requires more than just internships. Peeling back the cultural layers of this relationship may indeed assist in building trust and engagement.

Discovering what the industry needs is challenging for educational Indonesian providers. Making sure that educational provision is geared toward these industry needs may encourage relationships but will this be of benefit to the broader community? Chaudhary and Dhakal (2021) note that South Asian countries need to focus on education, training, and skill development to increase efficiency and productivity. Redirecting Indonesian educational provision toward ‘industry engagement’ may prove to be a Herculean task, in that there are some strongly competing outcome concerns that make this work-ready mindset difficult to maintain for tertiary education institutes (Biech, 2005).

### **Internships-The Easy Way Out!**

University placements in the industry operate in the form of internships, and according to some of our respondents lead to employment after university study (Garcia & Puig, 2011). To improve these outcomes ‘we have some partners but we need more’ laments one respondent. Another respondent reflected that having a lot more partners might increase the number of opportunities for internships. However, the quality of those industry placements depends on improving the communication between the university and the workplace. Academic staff needs to be proactive in their engagement with industry collaborators (Garcia & Puig, 2011), to proactively design activities and work activities that improve student performance whilst on placement. Monitoring the student’s placement requires good communication, which involves knowing (i) what students are doing, (ii) how much work is required, (iii) examining the circumstances that can be made to improve the placement, and (iv) mitigating risks for students to make internships safe (Odlin et al.,

2021). One respondent acknowledged that there are difficulties in managing the relationship with industry, suggesting that ‘industry is pretty busy with their staff, and sometimes they forget about our students,’ but how pervasive this attitude is, requires further examination.

### **Service Learning Opportunities for Engagement**

Under the Kampus Merdeka initiative, University and vocational graduates are required to provide a service for their local community. This is an extension of the previous policy of Kulia Kerja Nyata (KKN), which allows higher education curricula to include community service provision (Purwanti, 2021). These activities have a direct impact on the communities they serve, and may lead to employment in these communities, an outcome that was envisaged by Kampus Merdeka (Neumann, 2021). Writing in *Education, Conflict Histories and Social Cohesion-Building in Indonesia*, (2022) Hidayah and Ramadhany state that educational institutions contribute to the development of social cohesion through their influence on students and their actions as institutions with a social mission (Research Center for Politics and Governance, 2022). Indeed, many rural communities benefit from these projects as they involve bringing expertise around (i) community development, (ii) health and welfare, (iii) building infrastructure, and (iv) agricultural change. One respondent described how her students created a bi-lingual handbook of the artifacts in a local museum. This handbook was produced in printed and digital versions so that visitors or anyone online could access the museum’s collections. This project broadened the network of visitations to the museum, building a larger footprint of knowledge sharing. Another respondent described how they were ‘sending students to remote communities to help local children study [learn], while others included a focus on improving sanitation. These are examples of the types of community programs envisaged by Kampus Merdeka.

Notwithstanding the immediate success of this service to communities, the longer-term outcomes require further examination to establish the substantial effectiveness of these interventions. In this regard, one project which involved university students painting a slum area of Malang and turning that area into a tourist attraction has had a dramatic impact on the community (Rani & Wulandari, 2018). Further examination and evaluation of such community projects would provide a path forward for this project philosophy, and applying a most significant change (Dart & Davies, 2003) evaluation methodology to these projects could prove beneficial.

From an individual’s educational perspective, the measure of success is more easily defined in terms of aspects of personal impact and individual learning, and these changes can be measured by the students’ accounts and reports on the activities undertaken. This is a feasible approach because students are required to produce a ‘report’ on their activities reflecting on what they did, and this report includes feedback from those communities involved. In addition to this report, students are required to produce a journal of their daily activities. However, whilst these measures of success prove insightful for the individuals involved, they may not, or only marginally, measure the lasting broader civil and community impacts.

Whilst Kampus Merdeka has promoted and encouraged industry and community engagement as part of the student’s work-integrated learning pathway, at the same time, academic staff remain circumspect about the benefits and outcomes of these placements (Zulfikar, 2019). This is illustrated by a comment from one respondent: ‘If I do this (project) will this help my students?’ More focus on the individual educational outcomes and benefits of projects is required (Tedjokoesoemo et al., 2021), and this may indeed necessitate more detailed Institutional monitoring and evaluation protocols, quality assurance, and design of work-integrated placements (Smith et al., 2016).

### **Competencies and Curriculum**

The emphasis inherent in Kampus Merdeka’s vision is to ensure that universities assimilate the needs of industry requirements for work-ready graduates, in terms of both soft and hard skills (Krishnapatria, 2021). This was expressed by one respondent as; ‘As a University, we need to know what the market wants, we must provide university graduates with the skills the industry wants, otherwise it would be bad for our reputation.’ The Thematic Real Work Lecture (KKNT) program of Kampus Merdeka (Tohir, 2020) aims to provide a learning experience within the community. Students are expected to live in the community and design projects that assist them with recognized issues. Students are also expected to co-design, with

communities, projects that advance their needs. The KKNT program allows students to hone soft skills, establish partnerships, build cross-disciplinary cooperation, and develop leadership skills. Firdaus et al., (2022) argue that the Kampus Merdeka program can provide additional competencies to students, including skills in solving real complex problems, skills in analyzing, professional ethics, broadening perspectives, and giving new competencies. However, reputation aside, knowing precisely what the ‘market’ wants, is somewhat problematic.

To assure that educational institutes are meeting the needs of industry, university-wide committees have begun to revise and review their curricula with industry representatives. One respondent told us that ‘Industry representatives are involved in providing some input into university curricula, and when these are reviewed annually, their input is encouraged. [They] make suggestions and revisions to the curriculum. However, it is widely agreed that a stronger connection between Industry and University is required, with one respondent commenting that ‘We need to have the link and match between the University Department and Industry.’ The authors suggest that these links and matches need to extend beyond basic research, as there is some evidence to suggest that those academics that are involved in basic research are far less likely to engage with Industry (Perkmann et al., 2021).

Perkmann et al. (2021) noted that university policy should provide some visibility to those individuals that are already engaged with the industry, promoting this engagement over needing to research and ‘publish’ (Perkmann et al., 2021). Existing networks should be encouraged and supported across the university to build external engagements, with academics rewarded for sharing these networks. However, this is not currently the case as this comment reveals; ‘Some of our University Lecturers that have contacts in companies are required to inform their Heads of Departments that they have networks in the industry; however, they are not rewarded for doing this.’ Perkmann et al. note that there is not enough research to date on whether incentive structures work to modify and/or influence academics’ engagement patterns (Perkmann et al., 2021). On the surface, it would appear that coercion is not necessarily going to produce the sorts of responses that a university would require, or that Kampus Merdeka envisages.

## **MUTUAL INTERESTS AND UNIVERSITY CAPABILITIES**

Industry’s interest in partnerships centers around making products or gaining some strategic advantage in the production process, as expressed by one respondent as; ‘Our dream is to have better industry engagement, to develop products for industry for example; solar cell and other materials.’ This was endorsed by the Minister of Education reiterating encouragement for business interest in Kampus Merdeka; ‘we want businesses to express their own self-interest’ (Neumann, 2021).

The Minister’s desire to have business’s self-interest to drive industry engagement with universities may work for the industry sector, but it is, however, viewed quite differently in the higher education sector. Academic engagement with industry has evolved through the publication pathway, where university academics, in their pursuit of publications, engage with industry around their self-interest, which has then led to further cooperation. That said, when cooperation involved product design to production this became a particularly vexing issue, as one respondent indicated; ‘we need better cooperation for products - however, it’s not easy to introduce our products to industry.’ Whether or not self-interest works will require further research since it is recognized that strategic engagement necessitates that all partners understand the contribution, understand the ‘product’ and each partner finds a mutual common interest.

Kampus Merdeka has outlined a bold vision to build industry and community engagement, a seemingly desirable, yet challenging outcome in the Indonesian context. This is illustrated by this respondent’s comment; ‘not all faculties and departments are implementing community projects.’ Indeed, a study of 610 academics across Indonesia by Zulfikar (2019), examining the; perception of, trust in, and behavior toward Kampus Merdeka policy, found that a significant number of lecturers (42.5%) doubted their universities’ readiness for Kampus Merdeka, and more than a third indicated they were not ready to implement these activities. However, whilst learning off-campus (outside study programs) would be difficult to implement (70.3%), the majority of lecturers showed positive behavior toward this Kampus Merdeka policy (Zulfikar, 2019).

There are several barriers between universities and industry, and these include (i) motives, cultures, and lack of trust (Jonsson et al., 2015), (ii) trust and perception (Zulfikar, 2019), (iii) stakeholder involvement in the industry sector, particularly concerning the research culture (Yulianto et al., 2022) and the development of innovative work-integrated learning projects in the industry. The focus of Kampus Merdeka is to extend tertiary education into the community, ensuring that university and vocational education graduates are servicing the needs of the local community and meeting the needs of industry, on the surface seem quite appropriate. Indeed, Griffin et al. (2007) believe the vocational training sector is well-placed to assist in the facilitation of growth locally, particularly through its presence regionally and in its role to develop local human capital. Wallenborn (2010) emphasized the impact of non-formal learning structures in agricultural production and local businesses, a desirable outcome for Kampus Merdeka (Wallenborn, 2010). For these interventions to have traction within Indonesia, fundamental and systematic changes are needed, particularly around engagement with industry. These programs need to incorporate specific designs for (i) Assuring increased integration of vocational education with the higher education system; (ii) Facilitating greater industry input and engagement to create a more responsive human resource development environment; and (iii) Developing better assurance, particularly around the reliability, comparability, and quality of programs (Wallenborn, 2010).

Sustainable partnerships include building trust, engagement, and communication channels between the involved parties, and managing the day-to-day relationship education providers need to develop these skills, as noted by this respondent;

‘Not many lecturers working in the higher and vocational education have the experience of working in the private sector, it is very useful to have this perspective so that they can bring this perspective in their teaching about what is happening in their industry.’

This has remained an ongoing, and problematic issue for many vocational trainers. Whilst Kampus Merdeka is a relatively new and significant shift in policy direction for improving graduate employability in Indonesia, the higher education sector needs to be better prepared for its implementation (Purwanti, 2021). Many countries have introduced requirements for training staff to have a ‘background’ in specific fields of study. Others have introduced secondments to the industry for teaching staff as a means of ensuring current competency. Kampus Merdeka outlines some of these interventions that Universities are expected to implement (Purwanti, 2021).

The complexities involved in forming and maintaining partnerships require long-term and consistent organization. Dhillon (2007) emphasizes the importance of social relationships in the development of successful partnerships and emphasizes the need for focus on shared values and trust, and the building of a strong commitment to work together. Hutt et al. (2000), together with Sako and Helper (1998), identify important characteristics of trusting relationships, using techniques such as (i) Open and prompt communication; (ii) Frequent and timely interactions and exchange of information; (iii) Accurate feedback on each partner’s actions; and (iv) Sharing of information which can facilitate coordination between organizations.

Abdullah (2014) noted that concerning maintaining partnerships, one VET administrator believed that these important relationships all came down to building trust, especially when industry needs involve a range of structural and programmatic-based limitations that were imposed upon the training partner. According to Abdullah (2014), the processes that build (or reduce) trust are those events, transactions, activities, or partnering processes upon which partnering expectations are based. It was noted by Yoder and Ham (1999), that partnerships are characterized by their durability, flexibility, and cooperation; they are long-term relationships requiring a level of intimacy and interaction leading to trust and a mutual commitment to common goals. Arend (2004) contends that companies consider partnerships and alliances as a first step towards achieving their company’s goals, and therefore establish select VET training partners consistent with their business objectives.

Our respondents commented that universities are not well equipped to market themselves to industry, and this is a failure recognized in several studies on academic engagement with industry (Agrawal, 2013;

Campbell et al., 2021; Carter, 2021). Interestingly, Perkmann et al. (2021) noted that those individuals that are already engaged with industry need to be made visible to the broader academic community, but this view was contrary to that expressed by one respondent, who argued that;

*'We need better engagement with the industry through networks and branding. This branding is our university's weakest spot, we don't have a team dedicated to branding ourselves even in newspapers and magazines. With good branding, this would encourage industry to come to the University.'*

According to Perkmann et al., building and extending existing engagement activities would produce more meaningful results rather than 'broad' university marketing activities. There may be therefore a need to formulate a diverse array of strategies to engage with the industry since what works best for one institution may not work for others. Indeed, some faculties and departments are better equipped to engage successfully with industry, with our respondents noting that this was particularly the case for the engineering and science Faculties.

## **CLOSING REMARKS**

Whilst Indonesian educational providers have previously engaged with community and industry, Kampus Merdeka has dramatically shifted the existing notions of what community and industry engagement should look like. Kampus Merdeka can be seen as embedding the industrialization of education into the mainstream or providing opportunities to free the learners to develop an educational experience that matches their needs. However, there are notable concerns regarding the ability and capacity of educational institutes to implement Kampus Merdeka, and currently, there are not enough systems in place to measure the effectiveness of such a massive shift in educational provision (Siminjutak et al., 2022). It is noted that little is being done to support individual engagement activities, and this has a detrimental impact on these exchanges. Given MBKM's infancy, a detailed examination is required of its implementation, particularly around linkages and methodological approaches and their effectiveness. Further investigation is also needed to better understand the integration between work-integrated learning programs delivered by industry and community groups and the existing university curriculum. The authors also believe additional research is required to gain a better appreciation of the human capability and development requirements needed by universities to ensure sustainable community and industry engagement. The language of engagement requires; trust, clarity around motivation, and acceptance of cultural differences to advance the work-integrated learning outcomes for students across the archipelago.

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