

Freedom to learn–independent campus policy: Do we really find our freedom?

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ABSTRACT

What the job market demanded in the last few decades is overwhelming. Universities are working hard to meet the quality required by the job markets and it took a lot of effort, physically and mentally. Recently, the Minister of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia releases a policy that opens up the door to unlimited resources of learning. Students will be facilitated to choose their learning sources from outside the classroom, with real professionals. It is hoped that the quality of education in Indonesia will be enhanced and universities can produce graduates who have competencies that are relevant to the needs of industry, business, and the world of work. This research mainly reviews the Freedom to Learn–Independent Campus (FLIC) policy as an opportunity to conduct independent learning. Independent to choose the more contextual source of learning. Our study context is the implementation of the FLIC program specifically at the School of Business. The researchers conducted interviews with stakeholders related to the implementation of this policy (students, faculty members, co-educators). As a result, FLIC is perceived to have a positive impact on improving student abilities. However, there are still some obstacles that can be used as a basis for policy improvement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of independent learning has become a widely discussed issue in the world of education. Independent by means the concept that reflects independence in gaining the source of learning, allowing students to learn directly from their actual experiences outside the classroom [1]. This concept is one of the good opportunities for higher education institutions to embrace the rise of volatility, uncertainty, complex, ambiguity (VUCA) world in professional career by shifting the paradigm of education authority [2], [3]. Business schools should be prepared to face the issue by providing contextual learning for its student, gearing them up to be agile leaders in a complex business environment [4]–[6]. Not to mention the pandemic that has also been forcing education institutions to transform their learning process [7], [8].

In an attempt to enhance the education quality and to build a skillful yet agile graduate, in 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture Republic of Indonesia (through the Directorate General of Higher Education/DIKTI) release a new policy. It should be implemented in all higher education institutions in Indonesia. The policy called the Freedom to Learn–Independent Campus (FLIC), forcing all higher education institutions to innovate their learning method. With this policy, every department in every higher education institution is expected to conduct the learning process outside the classroom. It can be crossed with another

department within the same university or conduct the learning process outside the university as well as collaborating with another institution as co-educators [9], [10]. This innovation will also be set as one of the main performance indicators of a high-quality university. This policy brings a lot of breezes and a lot of shocks.

To date, we are accustomed to structured learning models. We have arranged what will be taught to students in such a way with a very rigid curriculum script base, accompanied by other complete learning documents. With the Freedom to Learn–Independent Campus (FLIC) policy, universities and lecturers must be ready to change the paradigm in designing learning models. FLIC requires universities to provide opportunities for students to study outside the classroom. Thus, what students will get in the field is not necessarily the same as what was designed by educators. Through this policy, educators must always be prepared for uncertainty about what will happen to the learning carried out in the field [11]. In a broader perspective, the FLIC policy was made as one of the catalysts to accelerate the achievement of Higher Education Key Performance Indicators (Indikator Kinerja Utama/IKU). It is a new performance measurement standard compiled by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia [9]. In the new performance indicators, the regulator hopes for an increase in the quality of higher education in Indonesia. The principles used as the basis for the preparation of the IKU are the relevance of the university to the needs of the professional world, the freedom for universities to hone their respective advantages, and the priority of targets for strategic changes. There are eight performance indicators set by Directorate General of Higher Education to support these general goals, implementation of FLIC being one of it.

This research analyzed the perceived impact of the implementation of FLIC on changes in learning methods carried out at the School of Business and analyze whether FLIC plays a role in changing the learning paradigm of an independent academic community. Some studies have been conducted to address this issue even though there still needs a lot more research to complement this study context [12]–[14]. This research fills the gap on whether or not the FLIC Policy really brings the freedom to acquire the broad spectrum of learning sources and learning methods and also captures the implementation of FLIC Policy within the School of Business.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

2.1. Participants

This research was conducted in Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This research captured the implementation of the FLIC Policy in the business education context. The respondent was all active students in the School of Business Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana along with specific faculty members who mentored students in every independent learning activity that were conducted outside the classroom.

2.2. Ethical issue

We understand the sensitivity and privacy of the information provided by all respondents. Therefore, we clearly asked for each of the respondent's consent regarding the usage of information provided by them to be analyzed in this paper. We build a rapport with each individual we interviewed and we do not disclose their personal data to the public. All of the respondents' identities were anonymous. Only information regarding the implementation of this related topic will be disclosed in this paper with their consent. All subjects in this research are free from conflict of interest.

2.3. Data collection and analysis

This research is mainly a qualitative study that aims to analyze the impact of the implementation of the FLIC policy on the School of Business. The data collection process was carried out in two stages, research questionnaires and interviews. Research questionnaires were distributed to all students of the School of Business, which consisted of the Accounting and Management program. This questionnaire is useful to gain a general opinion regarding the implementation of the FLIC policy. This short research questionnaire or poll was filled out by all of the School of Business students, gaining their perspective about FLIC implementation in university at glance. The authors aimed to analyze what students think about the policy, and the new method of outside-class learning.

Here are some questions asked in the questionnaire: i) Perceived usefulness of independent learning on enhancing students' technical skills such as problem-solving, critical thinking and analysis, professional code of ethics; ii) Perceived usefulness of independent learning on enhancing students' competence in order to increase the future graduates' employability; iii) Perceived importance of independent learning to compete in the future job market.

Then, the qualitative data collection process aimed to obtain a more in-depth perspective regarding the impact of implementing FLIC policies within the School of Business. In the second stage of the interview process, researchers conducted interviews with lecturers and students who have direct experience in the FLIC learning process. The authors specifically chose lecturers who mentored students involved in outside-class learning. Students who were interviewed are those who chose to involve in FLIC implementation. The interview result was scrutinized into several themes that will form the framework of this research. The themes raised in this study are reflected in the principles of FLIC implementation outlined by the Ministry of Education and Culture [9]. The Table 1 shows a description of the themes constructed in this research.

Table 1. In-depth interview themes

No.	Theme
1	The perceived impact of FLIC implementation on increasing the focus of the School of Business on the perceived competitive advantage it has.
2	The perceived impact of FLIC implementation on improving lecturers' skills
3	The perceived impact of FLIC implementation on improving student skills and increasing employability of business graduates
4	Lesson learned

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 presents the socio-demographic perspective of the respondents who fill out the polls. We managed to get the survey submitted by the majority of the population to analyze their general thought about the newly implemented policy. Results show that there is a total of 623 students from all years fulfilled the survey.

Table 2. Demographic data

Students' year	n
1st Year	143
2nd Year	119
3rd Year	136
4th Year	144
5th Year and above	81
Total	623

3.1. FLIC and its possible implementation in School of Business

The term 'independence' in FLIC policy is reflected in how the students acquire their learning sources. The students are free to learn from outside the classroom, with close mentoring from the lecturer and faculty member. Specifically, the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology (DIKTIRISTEK) has described the learning process into several learning activities. We call it Forms of Learning Activities (Bentuk Kegiatan Pembelajaran/BKP). Students are able to choose between eight independent learning activities designed by the ministry. Students are given the opportunity to choose learning activities outside departments within the same university, which will be converted into approximately 20 credits [15]. In another scheme, students are also given the opportunity to choose learning activities outside their university that will also be converted into approximately 20 credits. The learning activities offered by the DIKTIRISTEK are; the student exchange program, internships, community development, independent projects, entrepreneurial activities, humanitarian projects, teaching assistantship, and research projects.

The FLIC policy aims for learning innovation acceleration. It is expected to produce creative, innovative students with self-potential development in accordance with their talents. The School of Business itself has implemented an independent campus program. In our university, FLIC is implemented under several learning activities such as student exchanges, internships in a real workplace, community development, entrepreneurial project, and independent project. Not all of the learning activities designed by the authorities are the perfect fit for business education, even though there are no strict rules regarding what to choose and what not. University should be careful to choose the right activities that can reflect the achievement of graduates' learning outcomes. It is to ensure that the context would be proper and useful for the student. To justify the pros and cons regarding the FLIC program, we conducted an interview with faculty members who are directly involved in designing the FLIC program in the School of Business.

3.2. The perceived impact of FLIC implementation on increasing the focus of the School of Business on the perceived competitive advantage it has

In FLIC, there are several forms of learning activities offered by DIKTIRISTEK to be chosen by the School of Business. The selection of the form of learning activities must be adjusted to the graduate profile designed by each department. Ideally, the graduate profile is derived from the uniqueness of each department within the School of Business. For example, if a university sets its expertise as an entrepreneurial research university, the School of Business has a specialty in community-based projects and entrepreneurial projects. Thus, properly accommodated FLIC can achieve the strategic goals of the faculty. This was confirmed by a statement from the Dean of the School of Business.

“But this MBKM (FLIC) is a form of learning activity, not a course and it is part of the standard learning process. In the national education standards, we see that there are graduate competencies, there is learning content, there is a learning process and so on, in accordance with SNIKTI, Permendikti No. 3 of 2020. In MBKM (FLIC), we emphasize the learning process in a form of learning activities. Its impact is expected to strengthen the competence of graduates. That competence is reflected in the CPL – (learning outcomes). Then, it will require us to strengthen and sharpen both profiles, competencies, and curriculum.”

The learning activities (Bentuk Kegiatan Pembelajaran/BKP) designed by Directorate General of Higher Education encourage students to accumulate knowledge from outside the classroom. This is something positive to bring students a better understanding of the professional world they will face [16]. So far, there are still differences in perspectives between lecturers and practitioners. What is taught in class for four years may not necessarily be applied in the organization where graduates work [17]. With the FLIC program with eight BKP, students can gain learning from various perspectives, both from business organizations, communities, humanity, laboratories, research. Several Business Faculty lecturers also agree with this basic principle.

Several forms of relevant activities implemented by our School of Business that are adapted to the uniqueness of the department are entrepreneurship projects, community service program/community development projects, and independent projects. Through these three projects combined with appropriate information technology utilization, the School of Business can sharpen the focus of learning that is carried out in accordance with the uniqueness of the school-of-thought [18]. The uniqueness of the faculty must also be directly proportional to the availability of networks. The success of FLIC implementation is also determined by the network resources owned by the faculty. As a Business Faculty that prioritizes its role in empowering the local economy of the community, the implementation of FLIC must invite communities. It plays a strategic role in accelerating the implementation of FLIC, and improve the quality of learning gained from FLIC.

Based on this uniqueness, it can be concluded that the strength of our School of Business is community-based enterprises (CBE) development. FLIC which is realized in the form of project-based learning activities can be a good catalyst in strengthening CBE development learning [19]. Several previous studies also support the use of experiential learning methods or project-based learning as good learning innovation methods, especially in the realm of business or entrepreneurship [20], [21]. In the project-based learning process or concrete experience, students can learn the business environment independently and contextually. Students will experience real problems in the field which will lead to problem-solving skills. If this educational model is elaborated in the business school curriculum as a whole, the impact will be a significant paradigm shift and work ethic. In addition, the relevance of universities to be more adaptive to industry needs will be higher [22].

3.3. The perceived impact of FLIC implementation on improving lecturers' skills

The implementation of FLIC has an impact on improving the skills of lecturers. The following are excerpts of testimonials from several lecturers of the School of Business:

“... I have come to know and understand work patterns and think to produce recommendations for the company. Yes, although still at a beginner level, it really enriches my knowledge. When I was learning in the classroom, I only see the financial aspect of a company. Now I can see a company more broadly. So tomorrow when I return to classes, I could present cases I saw in the company.”

“... if in the internship, it seems that we have already known a lot in theory, but the reality it's still lacking, ma'am because in the field it takes strong analytical thinking power. Moreover, they (internship supervisor) conduct a regular meeting with the hospital, and then they have the ability to see what the main problem is so that they can give recommendations...”

Based on the interview excerpt, it can be seen that lecturers must also be life-long learners, not only in the interest of implementing FLIC policies. The willingness to continue to learn and contextualize experiences and sources of information obtained from varied sources will broaden the lecturer's paradigm [23]. Broad and diverse perspectives will be very useful when lecturers give lessons in class, especially in providing illustrations of business processes in an acute and creative manner [24]. In addition, flexibility in adapting learning resources will equip lecturers in providing concrete examples of cases that are actually experienced by business organizations [25]–[27].

It is undeniable that the demands of the industrial revolution have encouraged universities and their lecturers to expand their teaching and research mindsets. Analysis of industrial needs should be an important consideration in preparing teaching materials [28]. This does not mean that universities must abandon formal and conventional education models such as delivering material in class. However, a balanced collaboration between theory and practice is needed [29], [30].

3.4. The perceived impact of FLIC implementation on improving student skills and increasing employability of business graduates

Based on a survey given to business faculty students, we present the perceptions of the benefits of implementing FLIC on increasing graduate employability. Some of these questions are meant to capture the overall perceived impacts of FLIC implementation on improving student skills or what they are hoping to be. The researchers sought to know whether FLIC has the potential to enhance students' technical skills, graduate employability, and opportunities to compete in the job markets. The percentage of answers are displayed in Figures 1-3.

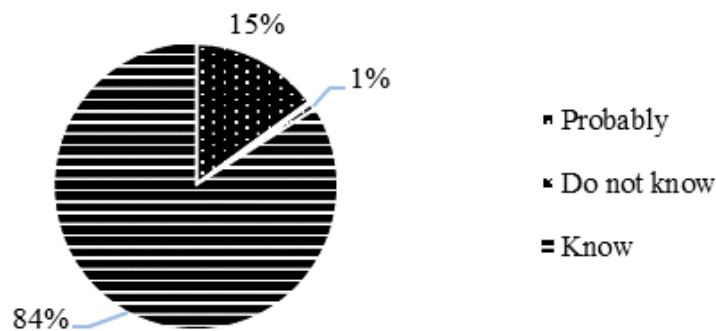


Figure 1. Perceived usefulness of independent learning on enhancing students' technical skills such as: problem-solving, critical thinking and analysis, professional code of ethics

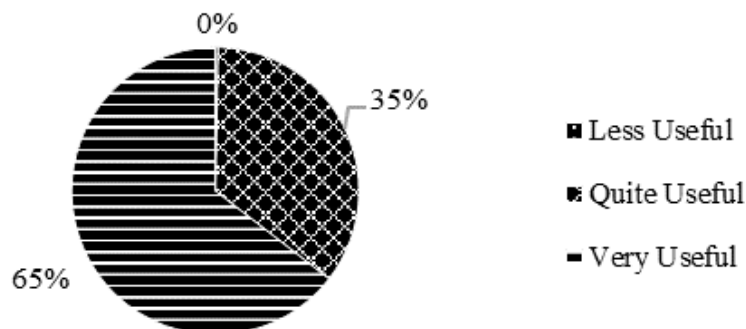


Figure 2. Perceived usefulness of independent learning on enhancing students' competence in order to increase the future graduates' employability

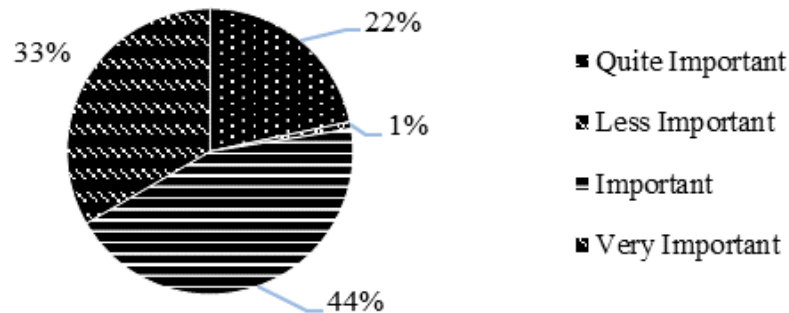


Figure 3. Perceived importance of independent learning to compete in the future job market

Based on opinions collected from students of the School of Business, the majority agreed that the implementation of FLIC would be beneficial for improving competence and provision for work after graduation. There are 65% of students have a perception that FLIC will increase the competitiveness of graduates while 35% of students think that FLIC will be quite useful in increasing the competitiveness of graduates. Only two respondents out of 623 total respondents are of the opinion that FLIC is less useful in increasing the competitiveness of graduates. Through this descriptive statistical analysis, it can be concluded that in general, the perception of the usefulness of implementing FLIC in the education curriculum of the School of Business will be able to increase the competitiveness of graduates in the future. This is also confirmed by the results of in-depth student interviews about the impact of FLIC implementation on their education.

“From me what I got, the first one is that in college, I usually get less theory and practice. Moreover, online like this, it is difficult to absorb the material, at least only videos from an assistant or lecturer. So, with this internship, we can apply it directly, for example, yesterday at Panti Rahayu I was asked to help with the reconciliation (journal account). Well, in theory, it's just the way it is, but what exactly is reconciliation? So yesterday, because we have the actual data, we immediately practice with the actual data, ma'am.”

The learning process through engaging in a concrete experience method will have more meaningful impacts because students start and end the process of accumulating knowledge from the information they receive through direct events [31]. Learning with this method is also proven to increase the retention of knowledge possessed by students, as expressed in the student statement above [32]. In addition, learning this model not only improves technical skills in running a business, but also general skills such as communication, interpersonal relationships, critical and analytical thinking skills, and problem-solving abilities [33], [34]. Graduates who have comprehensive skills are excellent graduates who will be in great demand by business organizations [35], [36]. These thoughts were also confirmed by a statement from one of the lecturers of the School of Business. Previous research also confirmed this innovative learning method would result to better learning outcomes, specifically in the business school [37], [38].

“For us in the accounting program, it (FLIC) narrows the gap between theory and practice in the professional world. So that when the gap is narrowed, the student becomes more prepared and know early, what to prepare when he or she will graduate and enter the world of work, that is very useful, for example, when we did internships at the hospital and others yesterday, the students were really glad because YAKKUM (foundation) opened up the widest opportunity for students to go work with them. It wasn't just at the front desk and didn't know inside, now that's very useful.”

Thus, it is confirmed that the experiential learning method through the implementation of FLIC will increase the competitiveness of graduates through comprehensive skill improvement. Several previous studies also found these positive effects [39], [40]. Previous research has shown that experiential learning could also promote students' perspective on university's reputation and self-perceived employability [41]. This proves that this policy has a potential good effect for the university, for the students' character development and their technical business skill needed by the professional world.

3.5. Lesson learned

The series of positive impacts that have been described must also be viewed from the other side of the coin. There are good experiences that can be used as a best practice. There are also valuable experiences that made our eyes wide open (as a lecturer). The paradigm of independent learning means that we must also be ready to be a flexible institution in extracting the policies into feasible operational standards. However, unresolved administrative complexities often become obstacles to establishing a truly independent learning context in higher education.

“In my personal opinion, if the selection system for students who can participate in MBKM must have a score above C then it only liberates children who are already independent. What about students who have a C grade and cannot repeat, do they not have the opportunity? Can students who have a C grade be given the opportunity? Maybe the conditions can be renewed again? Actually, many people are interested, but they are limited with the C grade.” (Student)

Unsurprisingly, there are additional requirements and mechanisms that become obstacles for students not being able to access education with an independent paradigm. Every student’s competency is complex and unique. Judging them by one or two failed subjects might not be the wise way to develop their comprehensive skill. Lecturers have to see it from a broader perspective. There are various dimensions besides technical skills that needs to be explored and evaluated. FLIC with its foundation on experiential learning might be the start to open up new possibilities [42], [43]. Emphasizing sensitivity, creativity, empathy, morality is as important as the technical issue [44]. This reflection hits us hard. If we are aimed to achieve the mightiness of IKU, along with its stellar requirement, but fail to be wise educators the overall education process is meaningless. If we are aimed to provide freedom to our students in gaining their knowledge, but we do not put ourselves to be gentle enough to let them be free; then it is just a wishful thinking of independent learning. This issue was also addressed by previous research [45]. In summary, several positive and negative points from the implementation of the FLIC policy are summarized in the Table 3.

Table 3. Pros and cons of FLIC implementation

Pros	Cons
1. Establishing cooperation between university and external educator partners to promote creative learning innovations and diverse sources to conduct a learning process.	1. Undeveloped system and policy. A “Freedom to Learn” article is supposed to be followed by the flexibility of the bureaucracy. Transforming the whole education system might take a long journey and an open-minded attitude from all parties.
2. Developing a more comprehensive business process understanding and seamlessly integrating it into the theories. Later on, students would gather an understanding of their respective interests in the business.	2. Difficulties of converting the FLIC learning activities (Bentuk Kegiatan Pembelajaran/BKP) into the structured subject assessment. The learning activities are not easily convertible into credits.
3. Engaging in an actual business experience by actively participating in the real business practice, guided by entrepreneurs as their mentors.	3. The high degree of uncertainty. As students gain their learning insight from outside the class, there is a high chance of misperception regarding the subjects/learning activities’ outcome accomplishment. Education partners might also possess different perspectives regarding the learning outcomes. The external learning environment itself may lead to a different angle of the learning process. Educators should be aware and have a high degree of flexibility.
4. Gaining new experiences by meeting other students from different universities. This experience would broaden students’ networks.	

4. CONCLUSION

The implementation of FLIC as a policy of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture is a breakthrough for the education system in Indonesia. Ready or not, all parties must start to improve themselves. The FLIC policy does not only have a narrow impact on improving the quality of university graduates. The FLIC policy touches all lines and elements at public and private universities. In general, the implementation of FLIC is considered beneficial for improving the quality of education, especially in the context of business schools. One of the most promising advantages is the possibility of schools of business to adapt learning methods that are relevant to the profile of graduates and the uniqueness of each department/faculty.

As a lecturer, we do have the authority to design our learning process in our classroom. As a researcher, we do have the authority to explore what lies in front of us, what subject are we actually interested in, what gap we need to fill in, and what answer should we need to find. As an educator, we are

also lifelong learner who does not stop learning, analyzing, criticizing, balancing, and exploring the possibilities of new findings. Combining enthusiasts in our field expertise and balancing it with the educator role is the foundation of the successful implementation of independent learning.

The paradigm that is promoted at FLIC is the paradigm of freedom to obtain learning resources. This paradigm change must first occur to the lecturer as a facilitator, subject expert, coach, and evaluator. If the paradigm shift is not first experienced by lecturers and institutions in a hierarchical manner, then the main objective of the FLIC policy formulation will fail. From several excerpts from interviews, it is found that the FLIC paradigm has not fully reflected in an intention to carry out a liberating learning process. There are still many administrative complex requirements that, if not addressed wisely, will derail students' opportunities to obtain diverse learning resources.

In general, the implementation of the FLIC policy has good prospects and is very suitable for the needs of the School of Business, which is also required to provide adaptive and creative learning. Business is a very volatile field. There are many uncertainties faced in the business world, yet learning at the School of Business so far has not taught students to practice dealing with uncertainty; the lecturers are also trapped in certain things. We teach a lot of theories and case examples with stagnant justifications. This is where the role of FLIC. It is to free the academic community to dare to think and create. Work, in this case, is not limited to the context of work.

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