

Strategies to Enhance the Employability of Higher Education Graduates in Indonesia: A Way Forward

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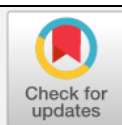
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ARTICLE INFO

Publication Info:
Research Article



How to cite:

Isbah, M. F, Kustiningsih, W., Wibawanto, G. R., Artosa, O. A., Kailani, N., & Zamjani, I. (2023). Strategies to Enhance the Employability of Higher Education Graduates in Indonesia: A Way Forward. *Society*, 11(2), 398-414.

DOI: [10.33019/society.v11i2.592](https://doi.org/10.33019/society.v11i2.592)

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the strategies implemented by higher education institutions in Indonesia to enhance the career sustainability of their graduates while exploring potential strengthening opportunities that need attention. The study is motivated by several significant changes, such as the expansion of a flexible job market and the uncertainty of the transition for graduates from the educational environment to the workforce. The research was conducted at eight universities in four cities from July to October 2021. The selection of these cities aimed to encompass the geographical diversity of Indonesia and represent the educational centers in each region. Data were collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) involving each university's students, alumni, and career development unit managers. Three main findings emerged regarding the efforts made by the universities, including curriculum adjustments by adding entrepreneurship courses, establishing or developing career development units, and expanding networks of partners to benefit students and alumni. However, institutional capacity, human resource availability, networks, and local contexts also influenced the selection and dynamics of the applied strategies. Consequently, the achieved outcomes varied and could not be measured with uniform parameters. This research argues that policy interventions to enhance the career sustainability of university graduates should consider

Received: August 14, 2023;
Accepted: December 30, 2023;
Published: December 31, 2023;

this complexity. Therefore, we recommend policymakers get involved in implementing independent learning and independent Campuses to understand the diverse initial conditions of universities.

Keywords: Career Sustainability; Curriculum Adaptation; Employability Strategies; Flexible Job Market; Policy Interventions

1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been increasing pressure on higher education to produce graduates with quality and capacities that align better with the ever-changing job market. This pressure is reflected in “employability” or “work-readiness.” Studies on employability among university graduates can be divided into two main focuses. First, studies investigate the transition from higher education to workforce instability. Second, studies pay attention to the efforts made by universities to enhance the capacities of students and graduates for better readiness in the job market.

The role of higher education in producing competitive graduates in the job market remains a crucial issue in various countries (Mgaiwa, 2021). Furthermore, technological advancements resulting from globalization have altered various aspects of life, including the demands for skills from graduates in the job market (Mgaiwa, 2021; Thirunavukarasu et al., 2020). In Malaysia, employability is a concern for both private and public universities, with success rates for final-year students reaching 76% (private) and 77% (public), indicating their relatively high success in the workforce (Kadiyono & Putri, 2022). However, this study highlights that in terms of work experience, final-year students in both private and public universities still require further development.

Meanwhile, in the Philippines, the employability rate for university graduates is relatively good, with the majority securing jobs within one to two semesters after graduation (Caingcoy et al., 2021). Nevertheless, despite the high employability rate, the salaries received by workers are still relatively low, influenced by communication skills, technological proficiency, time management, and flexibility in handling other tasks.

In a broader context, in the United Kingdom, the debate on the employability of university graduates has reshaped policies, focusing the teaching framework on how universities produce graduates relevant to the dynamics of the job market (Steur et al., 2012). In Australia, the employability of university graduates is also a crucial topic in various studies (Bennett, 2016; Clark et al., 2015; Moore & Morton, 2017; Priksat et al., 2020). Similar themes are evident in South Africa, where there is pressure to create graduates capable of responding to public dissatisfaction with the quality of graduates not meeting employer demands (Archer & Chetty, 2013). Meanwhile, in the United States, most universities strive to align conventional learning with the emerging demands of the job market (Artess et al., 2017).

Furthermore, over the past decade, Indonesia has undergone significant changes believed to impact the job market. These changes include shifts in the landscape and types of jobs due to geographical transformations, where rural areas are expanding into urban areas (Akatiga & White, 2015; White, 1983, 2012). Innovations and technology adoption have also disrupted various business models, creating new economic opportunities and shaping employment

relationships through “partnerships” (Fatmawati et al., 2019; Isbah, 2019; Nurcahyani & Isbah, 2020).

Secondly, the increasingly flexible job market is characterized by the rise of short-term employment relationships and a decline in the proportion of permanent jobs (long-life permanent employment). The issuance of Law the Republic of Indonesia Number 11 of 2020 concerning Job Creation (Omnibus Law) and its implementing regulations further strengthen the legal basis for the flexible labor market trend, emphasizing ease in recruitment and termination of employment relationships and continuous but not permanent work.

Thirdly, the high level of education participation is imbalanced with participation in the job market and the quality of available jobs. For example, universities throughout Indonesia produced more than 1.3 million graduates in 2019 (Kemenristekdikti, 2020), a number that is continuously increasing each year. Data from the National Labor Force Survey by BPS-Statistics Indonesia indicates that 535 thousand university graduates have been unable to enter the job market (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2020). For graduates, their challenge lies in the slow growth of middle-class jobs that do not match the annual number of graduates. The World Bank study found that out of 85 million income-earning workers, only 13 million (15%) have sufficient income to support a family of four with middle-class living standards (The World Bank, 2020). When graduates cannot find the desired middle-class jobs, the options are entrepreneurship or working for Minimum Wage jobs or even lower.

In addition to these issues, changes in the job market landscape and job aspirations among today's youth add new meaning and challenges to “transitional employment.” “transitional employment” refers to jobs individuals can obtain before securing their dream permanent jobs. Nevertheless, the temporal and digital-oriented job market landscape is also altering the job aspirations of university graduates. Surveys conducted by the World Economic Forum indicate changes in the aspirations and orientations of young workers (World Economic Forum, 2020, 2023). Aspirations in the creative and digital economy sectors are gradually replace traditional job types. Instead of focusing on permanent jobs, this new job landscape emphasizes its temporary and non-permanent nature. Some emphasized capacity improvements include analytical thinking, creative thinking, operating AI and Big Data, leadership, and social media influencing (World Economic Forum, 2023).

In the context of Indonesia, a significant new effort has been initiated, namely the implementation of the Independent Learning, Independent Campus (Merdeka Belajar, Kampus Merdeka or MBKM) program through the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Regulation Number 3 of 2020 concerning National Standards for Higher Education. This program is currently in the process of implementation at the undergraduate level across Indonesia, with eight choices of learning arenas/forms outside and inside the Study Programs (see: <https://kampusmerdeka.kemdikbud.go.id/>). MBKM aims to create a space for exploration and exposure for students beyond conventional lectures, such as corporate internships, implementing social projects in communities, or studying outside the Study Program and campus. With exposure like this, students are expected to gain inspiration and build post-graduation visions earlier, with a more adaptive and agile character when facing the job market. However, the MBKM scheme cannot be evaluated for its results yet as this policy is still in the preparation stage of implementation.

The key research question is how existing practices contribute to efforts to improve employability in higher education today. This research explores various strategies employed by universities to enhance the employability of their graduates, particularly through models providing transitional work experiences that universities, the government, private institutions,

and other relevant institutions can facilitate. In line with the preparation for implementing the MBKM scheme, the results of this research are expected to provide insights into the complexities occurring in the field regarding various efforts made, including the formulation of transitional work approaches.

2. Literature Review

The topic of young people's transition from education to the workforce in Indonesia has been studied by scholars (Naafs, 2013; Nilan et al., 2011; Parker & Nilan, 2013; Sutopo, 2015; Sutopo & Meiji, 2014). Several studies indicate that the extended period of education experienced by young people in Indonesia from elementary school to university, coupled with the lack of work experience during this study period, makes it difficult for them to find employment after university studies. Furthermore, these scholars also suggest that the work aspirations of most young people in Indonesia are directed towards the formal economic sector. Despite not promising high salaries, becoming a civil servant is the most sought-after employment option for young people. In addition to offering a regular salary, being a PNS also provides expectations of career advancement, retirement benefits, and social reputation. Limited job opportunities in the formal economic sector and civil service on the one hand, and the lack of work experience and the extended study period on the other hand, have led many young people to unemployment or entry into a "transitional job" for an extended period before finding the desired employment.

A recent study by Isbah et al. illustrates various strategies employed by university graduates during the COVID-19 pandemic (Isbah et al., 2023). Despite limited job opportunities and entrepreneurial prospects, they demonstrate resilience through meaningful social networking, religious activities, and skill upgrading. In short, Indonesian university graduates experience an irregular transition from education to the workforce (fractured transition), further exacerbated by the pandemic.

Meanwhile, other studies indicate a mismatch between the skills possessed by graduates and the types of jobs available in the job market (Amani, 2017; Mok & Jiang, 2018; Prikshat et al., 2020). This condition pressures students to increase academic credits and expertise to be more employable and competitive (Archer & Chetty, 2013). Another study mentions four skills learned by young people in Indonesia from both within and outside educational institutions: foundation skills, job-specific skills, transferable skills, and digital skills (Nambiar et al., 2019). In cities with diverse and extensive access, young people can acquire various skills through communities, society, and competitions. In contrast, in cities with limited access, young people may travel long distances to access government facilities supporting capacity development such as digital skills.

Based on the existing literature, various strategies have been implemented by universities to enhance employability, including partnerships with industries through university-industry partnerships schemes (Mgaiwa, 2021; Prikshat et al., 2020); regular curriculum development involving important and relevant stakeholders (Mgaiwa, 2021; Prikshat et al., 2020; Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017); adjustment of academic programs with government development plans (Mgaiwa, 2021; Prikshat et al., 2020); strengthening quality assurance systems (Mgaiwa, 2021; Prikshat et al., 2020); development of work-integrated learning programs (Jackson, 2014); internships (Clarke, 2018); entrepreneurship program development (Laalo et al., 2019); and development of the creative sector for students to gain work experience (Allen et al., 2013; Bridgstock, 2011).

Based on the literature mapping above, this study contributes to mapping the strategies implemented by Indonesian universities while outlining areas of improvement that still need strengthening to enhance the employability of university graduates.

3. Research Methodology

This research employs an exploratory qualitative methodology conducted in four cities: Yogyakarta, Surabaya, Medan, and Makassar. The selection of these four cities is based on considerations of regional representation, encompassing the western, central, and eastern parts of Indonesia. Additionally, the preceding year, we conducted an online survey with 800 fresh graduates from the selected universities, yielding findings on the dynamics of their transition from academia to the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study serves as a follow-up research with a distinct focus, complementing previous research findings.

In each city, we selected two different types of universities. This study chose public universities, teacher-training public universities, Islamic universities, and private universities. The selection of these four types of universities is expected to yield diverse findings.

Table 1. Research Subject

No	City	University
1	Yogyakarta	Universitas Gadjah Mada (Public University), Universitas Amikom (Private University)
2	Surabaya	Universitas Airlangga (Public University), Universitas Negeri Surabaya (Teacher Training Public University)
3	Medan	Universitas Sumatera Utara (Public University), Universitas HKBP Nomensen (Private University)
4	Makassar	Universitas Hasanuddin (Public University), UIN Alaudin (Islamic University)

Source: Primary Data (2021)

Initially, the data collection plan considered the implementation of field research. However, executing that plan became unfeasible due to the worsening pandemic in July-September 2021. Therefore, the decision was made to adopt a data collection method through Focus Group Discussions (FGD). FGDs were conducted involving students in each city (3 individuals per University, a total of 6 individuals per FGD session), alumni who graduated within the past 2 to 5 years (3 individuals per University, a total of 6 individuals per FGD session), and managers of career development units or alumni directorates in each University. Participant selection for the FGDs was done purposely with the assistance of research assistants in each university.

4. Results and Discussion

The general perspective among the universities we studied regarding the ideal employment for graduates still revolves around the traditional employment model, such as becoming a civil servant or a permanent employee in a company. Graduates' success is typically measured by attaining a job aligned with their chosen major during college. Nevertheless, universities recognize that not all graduates can easily secure jobs matching their academic backgrounds.

This awareness has prompted universities to implement several innovations. This research identifies three main strategies: curriculum adaptation, establishing and reinforcing career development units, and strengthening networks (partnerships and social connections).

4.1. Adaptation of Curriculum

The first finding of this research is curriculum adaptation by introducing entrepreneurship courses. At its simplest level, these courses provide knowledge and skills related to product creation, packaging, and marketing. Based on the FGDs conducted with alumni and students from eight campuses under study, it appears that these courses assist alumni in exploring transitional jobs before reaching their dream jobs. Most of these courses are attached to the economics faculty or the university-level career development center or are managed independently by the department or faculty with lecturers from external sources.

At the faculty level, entrepreneurship courses mainly focus on retail trade. In contrast, at the career development center level, they support entrepreneurship enhancement programs at the student level. These programs collaborate with state-owned enterprises and private entities. However, in coursework and career development units, the discourse on entrepreneurship in universities still centers around 'trading skills.' Only a few have begun to develop ideas about social entrepreneurship and enhancing others' life skills.'

The Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia initiated entrepreneurship education in higher education institutions in 1997 by introducing several programs, including Entrepreneurship Lectures, Entrepreneurship Internships, Business Work Lectures, Business Consultation and Job Placement, and New Entrepreneur Incubators. These programs were later packaged into the Student Creativity Program, which facilitates students' development of skills in research, community service, technology application, scientific articles, entrepreneurship, and more. Until 2009, the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia specifically designed the Student Entrepreneurship Program where students could become job creators.

In the past decade, almost all universities in Indonesia have implemented entrepreneurship education through various mechanisms aimed at creating young entrepreneurs ([Susilaningsih, 2015](#)). Entrepreneurship education is not limited to a specific field or profession. In 2010, six universities implemented entrepreneurship courses in their curricula, namely Universitas Indonesia (UI), IPB University (IPB), Universitas Padjadjaran (Unpad), Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), and Institut Teknologi Surabaya (ITS) ([Detikfinance.com, 2010](#)). The curriculum taught by these six universities includes soft skills, including business ethics and technical skills. However, each university has the authority to include entrepreneurship in its curriculum. For universities that do not include entrepreneurship in their curriculum, they also develop entrepreneurial models. Furthermore, in 2017, three universities obtained permission to open entrepreneurship faculties from the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education of the Republic of Indonesia, namely the Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), Universitas Brawijaya (UB), and Universitas Katolik Widya Mandala Surabaya (UKWMS) ([Jawapos.com, 2017](#)).

In this study, we found diverse dynamics in the implementation of entrepreneurship, as depicted in the following table.

Table 2. Dynamics of Entrepreneurship Implementation in Higher Education

No	University	Dynamics of Entrepreneurship Implementation
1	Universitas Gadjah Mada (Yogyakarta)	<p>⇒ Implementing the Social Entrepreneurship course as a university-level Interdisciplinary Course initiated by the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences.</p> <p>⇒ This course is designed with an innovative approach, encouraging participants to explore new approaches to addressing social issues, particularly through social entrepreneurship.</p>
2	Universitas Amikom (Yogyakarta)	<p>⇒ Offering the Entrepreneurship major under the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences.</p> <p>⇒ Implementing the 2020 Entrepreneurship Curriculum.</p>
3	Universitas Airlangga (Surabaya)	<p>⇒ Established an institution called the Job Placement Center (PC UNAIR), which is currently known as the Career Development and Entrepreneurship Center (PPKK UNAIR) in 2003. This institution is tasked with bridging alumni or job seekers with employers or the business world and providing information about job opportunities to alumni.</p> <p>⇒ Organizing various activities, including job fairs (Airlangga Job Fair).</p>
4	Universitas Negeri Surabaya (Surabaya)	<p>⇒ Organizing entrepreneurship programs that include the Student Entrepreneurship Program, Indonesian Student Entrepreneurship Activities, and Indonesian Student Start-Up Acceleration.</p> <p>⇒ Declaring the opening of the Digital Business Study Program under the Faculty of Economics and Business to foster young entrepreneurs, starting in June 2021.</p>
5	Universitas Sumatera Utara (Medan)	<p>⇒ Establishing the Student Entrepreneurship Center (SEC) to produce graduates with entrepreneurial skills and independence and contribute to creating job opportunities for the surrounding community.</p> <p>⇒ Opening the Entrepreneurship Department under the Faculty of Economics and Business in 2021.</p> <p>⇒ Its vision is to become a University for Industry.</p>

No	University	Dynamics of Entrepreneurship Implementation
6	Universitas HKBP Nomensen (Medan)	⇒ Does not have
7	Universitas Hasanuddin (Makassar)	⇒ Has a Directorate of Entrepreneurship tasked with formulating strategies, is responsible for intellectual property acquisition, managing research results, and creating effective and efficient asset management. ⇒ Focuses on the development of entrepreneurial capabilities.
8	UIN Alauddin (Makassar)	⇒ Collaborating with the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Indonesia to organize a public lecture on entrepreneurship with the theme "Independent Youth: Entrepreneurship and Independence."

Source: Primary Data (2021)

At least, this study identified three interesting points related to the implementation of entrepreneurship in universities:

First, the implementation of entrepreneurship in universities varies widely according to the capacity and focus of each university. Universities, especially at the faculty and/or program level, respond to the emergence of entrepreneurship education in a binary manner, namely pro and contra (Susilaningsih, 2015). This response arises based on the suitability of the output from entrepreneurship education to the Learning Outcomes owned by each study program. Nevertheless, Government Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia Number 17 of 2020 concerning the Management and Implementation of Education, especially articles 61-62, states that one of the goals of higher education is to form individuals who are critical, creative, innovative, independent, confident, and entrepreneurial. Universities that respond positively translate entrepreneurship through several schemes, including creating entrepreneurship courses, creating programs or activities related to entrepreneurship, establishing special units related to student entrepreneurship, and creating new programs/departments specifically for entrepreneurship.

Second, the implementation of the entrepreneurship concept is generally still closely related to the economics faculty. To support entrepreneurship programs, various universities internalize the entrepreneurship concept into the entrepreneurship education curriculum, which is tendentially connoted as business education that includes materials and activities related to building an entrepreneurial mindset, communication skills training, and building networks and developing business plans oriented towards profitability (Susilaningsih, 2015). The creation of new entrepreneurship-based programs, accompanied by the development and implementation of entrepreneurship curricula, has become widespread in the last 2-3 years in line with the emergence of the MBKM program, which emphasizes exposure to the working world for students to improve the employability of university graduates.

Third, universities' various strategies in entrepreneurship produce diverse outcomes. However, the main orientation of emerging entrepreneurship activities tends to focus on producing financially profitable products. Most activities in this direction are developed through entrepreneurship programs attached to career development units or other specialized units.

4.2. Career Development Center

All the universities we examined have a career development unit, but their positions within the institutional structure vary, influencing their capacity and roles. Most career development centers at the university level prioritize graduate 'tracer studies' as a requirement for university accreditation rather than developing programs to enhance students' abilities to enter the workforce. Career development centers at the university level generally emphasize 'job fair' activities and job vacancy information rather than developing programs to prepare students for the workforce.

The results of our FGD with students and alumni indicate that most of them are not familiar with the programs offered by the career development center on their campus. While they know the existence of career development units and institutions on their campuses, they are less interested in the programs initiated by these institutions or find them monotonous.

An excessive focus on 'tracer studies' and output-oriented programs like 'job fairs' makes career development centers less noticeable to students as places for personal development before entering the workforce or as a reference source. Most students say they acquire additional skills through student organizations, alumni networks, and other resources. The lack of program variety for developing students' skills for entering the workforce makes the career development center primarily function as an 'Event Organizer' for job fairs and less popular among students.

Only a few campuses are developing innovative programs. For example, one of the leading universities in Yogyakarta has integrated courses on social entrepreneurship, social innovation, and 'future skills.' Furthermore, courses like 'future skills' aim at a broader audience beyond the campus environment. Additionally, the management of career development units is no longer centralized at the university level but is now at the faculty level. This, in turn, expands the reach of institutions to students or, conversely, makes students feel closer and more accessible.

The institutional status of the campus also affects the position and innovation of career development centers and programs to enhance students' abilities to enter the workforce. Campuses with Public Universities with Legal Entity Status tend to have more flexibility in developing programs and organizing the position and function of career development units. On the other hand, Public Universities with General Services Bureau status are limited in creating programs and managing their career development centers. These differences more or less affect the orientation and programs of institutions or career units in designing programs for students.

Table 3. Programs and Activities Implemented by the Career Development Unit

Name of University	Name of Career Development Center	job vacancy	Internship Vacancy	Career Services	Career Class	Job Fair	Alumni Sharing	Scholarship Information	Student Entrepreneurship Program	Career Planning Training	Civil Service Examination Information
Universitas Gadjah Mada	Alumni UGM	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				
	CDC FISIPOL UGM	✓	✓		✓			✓			
Universitas AMIKOM	Business Placement Center (BPC)	✓			✓	✓					
Universitas Airlangga	Direktorat Pengembangan Karir, Inkubasi Kewirausahaan, dan Alumni (DPKKA)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Universitas Negeri Surabaya	Unesa Career Centre (UCC)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Universitas Sumatera Utara	Pusat Jasa Ketenagakerjaan (PJK)			✓		✓				✓	
Universitas HKBP Nommensen	Career Center HKBP Nommensen	✓	✓		✓					✓	
Universitas Hasanudin	1. Direktorat Alumni dan Penyiapan Karir (DAPK) 2. Direktorat Inovasi dan Kewirausahaan	✓	✓	✓							
	Career Development Center (CDC) Universitas Hasanuddin	✓	✓	✓							
UIN Alaudin	Career Development Center (CDC) UIN Alaudin	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓

Source: Primary Data (2021)

This research conducted mapping related to programs carried out by each career development unit in the eight universities under study. Findings from this research indicate several reasons why career development units are less attractive to students, including:

- 1) Governance of career development units: not all are at the faculty or department level. However, each career development unit has a website portal or social media as a promotional strategy. However, this is not able to reach students comprehensively.
- 2) Programs provided are not in line with the needs of students, especially in entrepreneurship. Based on the mapping conducted, only three universities have entrepreneurship programs: Universitas Airlangga, Universitas Negeri Surabaya, and UIN Alaudin.
- 3) Not all universities have career planning training. Of the eight universities, only three have such training: Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Universitas Sumatera Utara, and Universitas HKBP Nommensen.
- 4) Alumni-sharing programs are not widely conducted by universities, even though these programs have the potential to provide tips and strategies for students in the world of work or the profession they aspire to.

4.3. Networking Development (Partnerships and Social)

Networking is one of the ways to mobilize resources outside the institution. Networking can be formal communication, partnerships, and more informal interactions and engagement. In this research, several forms of networking were identified: 1) Tracer study: Conducted as part of accreditation fulfillment and efforts to explore partnership opportunities; 2) Capacity development events: In the form of seminars or talk shows to enhance capacity or spread positive inspiration while providing a platform for networking development; 3) Collaboration programs: With the industrial and governmental sectors for internship activities for students. These networking activities aim to expand the learning opportunities for students before entering the workforce, opening up job opportunities and fostering entrepreneurship.

These networks provide information channels for students to access job opportunities and networking, as expressed by one informant:

"At Amikom itself, many units facilitate it, one of them being ABP (Amikom Business Park) from the campus. So, it accommodates Amikom students who want to start a startup. Some time ago, it also opened opportunities for students outside Amikom to learn together in groups." [Ela, Universitas Amikom Student, FGD]

While such activities create networking opportunities for students across universities to develop insights and open up future cooperation possibilities, most informants in this study admitted that programs managed by career development centers at their respective universities do not significantly help the job-seeking process. This tendency is attributed to three main conditions.

First, information and opportunities offered by career development units are not strategically disseminated, resulting in only a small number of students accessing them, as mentioned by Dina, a student from Universitas Negeri Surabaya:

"Maybe from my perspective, I haven't accessed the career center because it seems quite limited in terms of publicity. So, there are probably some departments, like mine,

where not many people know about the career center.” [Dina, Universitas Negeri Surabaya Student, FGD]

Apart from strategically distributed information, opportunities offered by career development centers tend to be irrelevant to students’ expectations and the needs of the job market, as expressed by an alumnus from Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU), stating that the ‘campus only focuses on what they think without understanding the world beyond them’ [Fahri, USU Alumni, FGD]. This viewpoint implies a pattern of managing networking partnerships by career development units that leans toward formality and is not aligned with students’ aspirations and needs.

This situation prompts students to seek opportunities from informal sources, such as alumni associations, intra and extracurricular campus organizations, and communities outside the university. Moreover, students and alumni often leverage informal networks to expand job opportunities and entrepreneurial development. Such informal networks effectively connect students with the working world.

Based on the mapping from the focus group discussions (FGD), partnership networks built by career development units are insufficiently effective in providing students with opportunities to enhance employability. This inefficiency is attributed to formalizing opportunities and access available to students. On the other hand, students and alumni have built relationships informally through their networks. Effective pathways often emerge from informal networks, as outlined below:

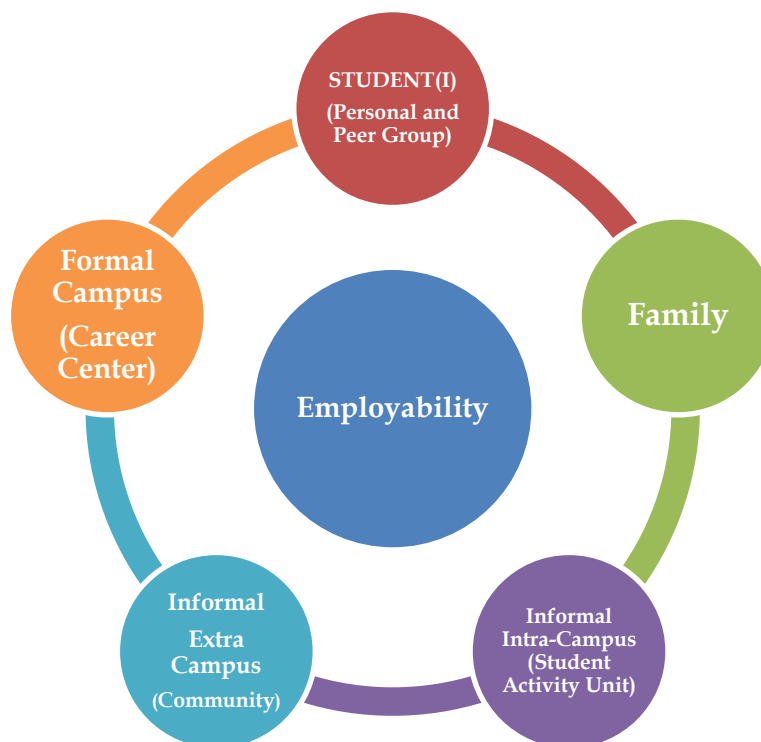


Figure 1. Informal Networking for Student Employability
Source: Primary Data (2021)

Informal partnership networks these students maintain serve as a platform for enhancing employability, which is evident in three main aspects. Firstly, intra and extracurricular campus organizations act as moments and spaces for learning where students can understand the skills

required in the workforce. Based on mapping from focus group discussions (FGD), students actively involved in organizations gain experience to enhance both soft and hard skills needed to enter the workforce. Secondly, student activity units within and outside the campus have close connections with alumni from relevant organizations. These relationships often create opportunities for students to enter the workforce more effectively than formal connections established by Career Development Units in related universities. Thirdly, the main characteristics of informal intra and extracurricular organizations, being flexible, informal, and relatively equal, allow students to learn about the workforce and build strategic networks more effectively.

5. Conclusion

This study identifies three strategies that have been adopted by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to increase the employability of their graduates. Institutional capacity, human resources, networks and local context also influence the choices and dynamics of the strategies taken. We argue that policy interventions to increase college graduates' employability must consider these complexities.

To encourage the enrichment and optimization of the role of HEIs in this issue, we recommend the following: First, a contextual understanding of the conditions of various higher education institutions is needed, including aspects of institutional capacity, networks and opportunities in each local context.

Second, related to implementing the Independent Learning, Independent Campus (MBKM), HEIs have various pre-existing conditions. Some already have embryonic programs and networks, while others are just starting discussions and preparations. Therefore, knowledge sharing and network matching support is needed, especially for small campuses or those on the outskirts.

Third, there needs to be a mutual learning forum between universities or between managers of career development units to facilitate the exchange of ideas, information and best practices. Knowledge exchange can cover topics such as developing programs and activities that are more beneficial for students, strategies to attract student interest and participation, developing collaborative networks with strategic partners, and so on.

Lastly, HEIs must be encouraged to be more open and supportive of student activity spaces, such as Student Activity Units, creative and hobby groups, and student organizations (BEM and extra-campus organizations). These spaces provide a fertile environment for the development of informal networks that can provide benefits for activists.

6. Acknowledgment

The data collection for this article was funded by the Policy Research Center, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia in 2021. The publication process of this article received support from the publication grant of the Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia, in 2022. The authors express their gratitude to all research assistants who reached out to all informants during the pandemic's peak and to all informants willing to share their experiences and perspectives in this research.

7. Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors have declared no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and/or publication.

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