Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards Program: Chances and Challenges

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Abstract
The Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards is a Ministry of Education program designed for students to participate in academic mobility programs for one semester at leading universities and industries abroad. In addition, the program aims to develop students' ability to be independent, think critically, communicate, work in teams, and provide the experience of living and studying abroad. As a newly implemented program, there are certainly many challenges faced by the government, universities as the organizers, and students as individuals selected to participate in the program. While there are many challenges, there are also many opportunities for governments, universities and students to increase networking at the global level. This research aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities of the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards program after being implemented for four years. This research uses a qualitative method with a multi-case study approach. The data sources are taken from twelve informants through individual and group interviews, consisting of university leaders, the head of the international affairs office, students who have participated in the program, and supervisors selected through purposive sampling. To strengthen the interview findings, the author also gathered data from expert opinions and highly reputable journals related to this research in the same context and issue. All data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis technique. The research findings reveal four crucial challenges and four future opportunities. If the challenges are overcome and the opportunities are maximized, the prospect of a golden Indonesia 2045 can be achieved brilliantly. All of these findings will be discussed in depth and holistically in the results and discussion section.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia as a developing country needs qualified human resources to improve global competitiveness (Cinicioglu et al., 2017; Efendi et al., 2020; Hermanto, 2023; Indrawati & Kuncoro, 2021). Higher education has a strategic role in developing students' abilities (Al-Twijri et al., 2024; de la Fuente et al., 2019; Willenborg & Detmering, 2024). Therefore, internationalization of higher education has become an important necessity to improve the quality of education and prepare students for global challenges (de Wit & Altbach, 2021; Liu, 2021; Mandigo et al., 2021; McGrath et al., 2021). Internationalization of higher education brings various benefits, such as improving the quality of education, expanding employment opportunities, developing English language skills, and building international networks (Aslan & Thompson, 2021; Kalocsányiová, 2020). Students can access the latest knowledge and technology, and gain global learning experiences, which will improve their leadership skills and competitiveness at the global level (Bolden et al., 2023; El Junusi et al., 2024; Kwon, 2021; Orfanidis, 2023; Shen et al., 2020).

The internationalization of higher education in Indonesia aims to make Indonesia a regional education hub, improve university rankings globally, develop the national economy, and build a global-minded society. Thus, Indonesia can become a more competitive and influential country at the international level (Bardakci et al., 2024; Marzouk, 2024; Sakhiyya, 2022; Suwignyo, 2024).

For this reason, as the world keeps evolving at a much higher pace, workforces face challenges that our previous generations never encountered before. Led by a globally connected world, computational thinking, the rise of intelligent machines and systems, and other drivers of change, we believe that learning should not only be performed through conventional lectures, limited by time and space dimensions, and focusing only on a single scope of interest. Instead, we believe that our future generations should be exposed to broader experiences, engage with people from different academic backgrounds, cultures, and races, and become global citizens. Understanding the current gap and anticipating the upcoming opportunities, the government of Indonesia, through The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, the Republic of Indonesia invested in Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards.

Indonesian international student mobility awards are a government-funded flagship scholarship program, centrally managed by the Directorate General of Higher Education, Research, and Technology, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, to fund Indonesian undergraduate students for mobility programs at top partner universities overseas. Selected students can spend one semester to study courses outside their major, develop intercultural communication and leadership skills, experience the host country's culture, extend international networks and do practical assignments to enhance their skills, enabling our next generation in becoming future global-minded leaders in their field of expertise (Hou & Du, 2020; Quintero & Zerva, 2023).

The international student mobility awards program organized by the Ministry of Education, Research, and Technology is important as an overseas mobility program. This program aims to improve the quality of Indonesian higher education, develop students' academic and professional abilities, and build Indonesia's reputation as a country with quality education (Asril et al., 2023; Kristiana & Benito, 2023; Madrah et al., 2019). Globalization and technological developments have

created intense global competition in various fields. Indonesia needs qualified, competent and globally-minded human resources to face these challenges. Therefore, the Indonesian government launched the Indonesian international student mobility awards program to facilitate student mobility abroad and improve the quality of higher education (Nasution & Suhairi, 2023; Prabowo et al., 2023; Wijayanti, 2021).

To identify, analyze and evaluate the Indonesian international student mobility awards program that has been running for four years, it is necessary to conduct a study to measure the extent to which this program has had a positive impact on the government, universities and students? What are the challenges faced and what are the opportunities that can be achieved? Furthermore, based on the author's search, studies related to the challenges and opportunities of the Indonesian international student mobility awards program have never been carried out by previous researchers, so of course these findings will be an initial evaluation for all policy makers such as the government, universities, offices of international affairs, lecturers and students.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative method with a multi-case study type. The choice of methods and types used in this study is appropriate and appropriate with the objectives to be achieved in this study, namely to identify and analyze a problem topic in depth. As Engkizar et al. (2022); Halkias et al (2022); Käss et al (2024); Syafril & Yaumas (2017); Uiboleht et al (2016) state that qualitative methods with multi-case study types can be used by researchers who want to examine a topic in depth but are carried out in several different locations.

The research instrument used in this study is a set of structured interview protocols made by the author according to the desired data needs. The interview instrument refers to what is suggested by Peticca-Harris et al., (2016); Solarino & Aguinis, (2021); Swain & King, (2022) which states that in order for the interview to be neatly organized and the informant to easily understand the flow of the conversation, a researcher is important to arrange the interview protocol in several parts, namely opening questions, introduction, transition, key, and closing questions. The researcher must still play a role in guiding the conversation with the informant so that the data sought is in accordance with the research.

Furthermore, data sources were taken from twelve informants through individual and group interviews consisting of university leaders, the head of the international affairs office, students who have participated in the program and supervisors who were selected using the porpusive sampling technique. The selection of criteria and the number of informants in this study refers to what is outlined by Akhter & Qadoos, (2017); Kächele, (2018); Murniyetti et al., (2016); Seers (2012) that there are four criteria for someone to be used as an informant in a study, namely understanding well the problem under study, still active in the field under study, having time to provide information to researchers, and must provide information in accordance with the facts that occur in the field. The total number of informants involved is adjusted to the data needs of this study.

To strengthen the findings of the interview above, the author also took data from expert opinions, highly reputable journals related to this research in the same context and issue. In addition, the author also took quotations written by experts and observers of education specifically related to the implementation of the

Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards program, so that the data of this study became more robust and in-depth. All data collected were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive analysis technique. The procedure of this study is shown in figure 2.
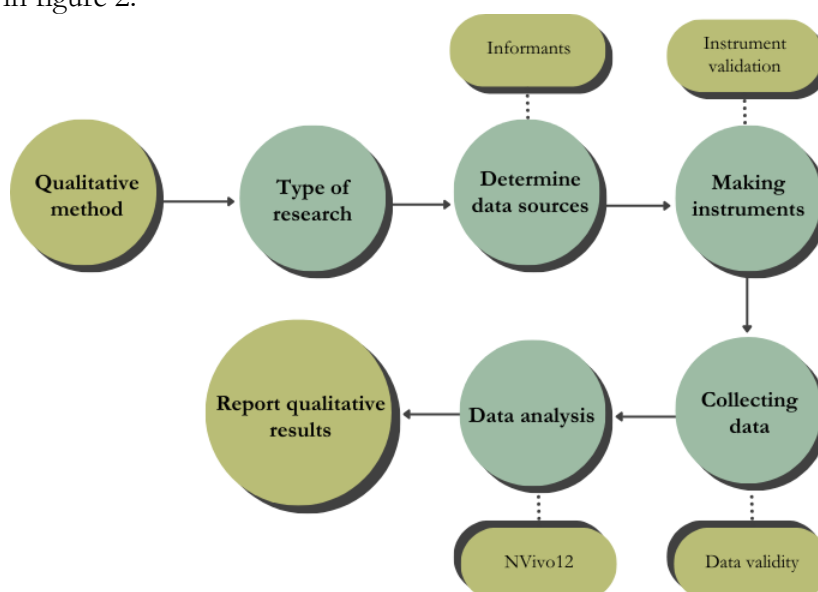

Fig 2. Research Thinking Framework

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews with all informants and supported by the results of previous research on the issues and topics being studied, the research findings show that there are eight themes that emerge, the eight themes are divided into aspects, namely four themes related to the challenges faced, then the next four are related to the opportunities achieved in the future about the Indonesian international student mobility awards program.

Challenges faced

In the first part of the results and discussion, the author will present aspects of four themes related to the challenges faced by the government, universities and students in implementing the activities of the Indonesian international student mobility awards program. The four challenges are i) limited budget to support the program, ii) the number of students who have the potential and meet the criteria is still low, iii) there is no maximum relationship with industry for job placement and iv) the mobility of processing documents and visas for students. As shown in figure 2 below.
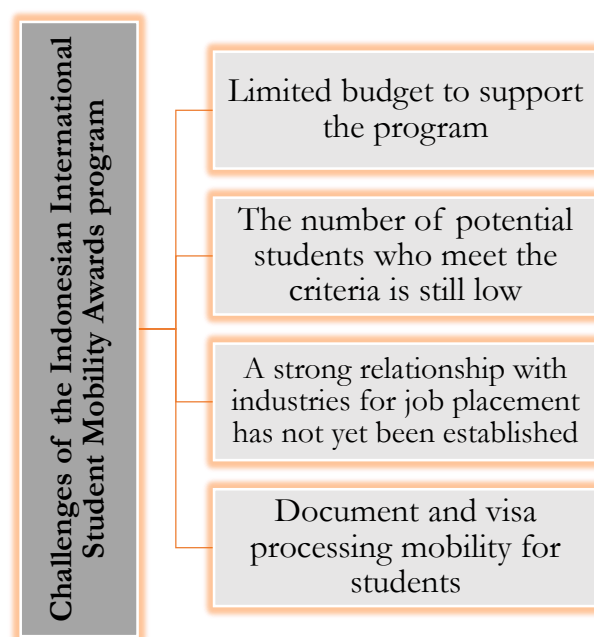
Fig 2. Challenges of the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards program

Based on Figure 2 above, the author can explain that there are four challenges faced by the government, universities and students in organizing the activities of the Indonesian international student mobility awards program. The four challenges are limited budget to support the program, the number of students who have the potential and meet the criteria is still low, there has not been a maximum relationship with industry for job placement and mobility in processing documents and visas for students.

Furthermore, the four challenges as found above will be discussed by presenting selected quotes with several informants who stated the theme. After the interview excerpts are presented, the author strengthens by analyzing with various expert opinions and synthesizing with previous research related to this issue in a similar context and issue.

Limited budget to support the program

The limited budget to support the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards program is a significant challenge that affects the effectiveness of the program (Kristiana & Benito, 2023; Sudarwati et al., 2024). Limited state budget, other budget priorities that are also government priority programs will certainly have an impact on the limited funds to support this program. This has an impact on the limited number of scholarship recipients, limited duration and location of the program, and less than optimal program quality. As stated by the informant in the following interview excerpt

> *... this is a new program from the ministry of education, so, of course our budget is still limited, because there are still other priority programs at educational institutions* (informant 3).

Other informants also stated that the costs incurred for this program were so large because of the distribution of different countries for all students such as America, Europe and Southeast Asian countries, as the following interview excerpt;

> *... we send students to various countries with higher living costs while our budget has not been*

maximized, in the future it will be maximized again so that this program is getting better (informant 7).

The number of potential students who meet the criteria is still low

At the beginning of the Indonesian international student mobility awards program, three hundred undergraduate and vocational students from six or three universities across Indonesia participated in the program. In the implementation of the first session of activities, it turned out that not all students knew about this activity thoroughly, but in the next session the number of students participating increased significantly. However, the criteria and requirements that must be met by students cannot be fulfilled to the fullest, both from the requirements of achievement and especially English language skills. This theme is as stated (informants 4&5) as the following interview excerpt

...among the obstacles faced by students who register are related to English language skills... of course the students we choose are very selective and have abilities above the average of other students, I see the aspect of English language skills that our students have a major challenge.

The number of potential students who meet the criteria of the Indonesian international student mobility awards program is still relatively low, due to several factors such as limited awareness of the program, lack of English language skills, and high academic standards (Moybeka et al., 2023). This causes many potential Indonesian students not to be represented in this program, so it is necessary to do more intensive promotion and assistance to increase the number and quality of applicants.

A strong relationship with industries for job placement has not yet been established

The Indonesian international student mobility awards program is not only given to students with a background in education and science majors. But also to vocational students, of course the placement for vocational students is more in the industrial world of work or also placed in various specialized laboratories. As stated by the informant in the following interview excerpt;

... The selection of placements with the world of work industry still has several obstacles such as the lack of intense cooperation and other obstacles, but overall it has worked well (informant 4). *...However, of course in the future it needs improvement, such as after an evaluation of the activities that have been running* (informant 11).

The Indonesian international student mobility awards program has not established maximum relationships with industry for job placement, so students who have completed the program still face difficulties in finding jobs that match their competencies . Therefore, efforts need to be made to strengthen cooperation with industry, such as through internships, joint research and curriculum development that is relevant to industry needs.

Document and visa processing mobility for students

The issue of documents such as visas for student departures in the Indonesian international student mobility awards program is still one of the challenges faced. However, this problem is not unique to Indonesia, in many countries where foreign students study, the same challenges and problems exist;

...Related documents such as passports, academic scores and especially visas for student departure requirements have actually become problems and challenges in all countries, we have maximized this, of course not all went well, but in general none of our students failed to leave (informant 1). *...yes all countries face the same thing, in the future we will improve and do the best for this* (informant 10).

Processing documents and visas for students of the Indonesian international student mobility awards program is often a complicated and time-consuming process. Students must prepare documents such as passports, visas, letters of recommendation, grade transcripts and proof of English, as well as fulfill specific requirements from universities and destination countries (Wen et al., 2018). This process can cause delays in departure or even cancellation of the program, so effective support and guidance is needed from the program manager.

Chances achieved

Furthermore, in the second part of the results and discussion, the author will present aspects of four themes related to future opportunities achieved related to the Indonesian international student mobility awards. The four opportunities are i) improving the reputation of Indonesian universities at the global level, ii) providing students with study abroad experience, iii) developing international cooperation between universities and iv) providing career opportunities abroad for students. As shown in figure 3 below.
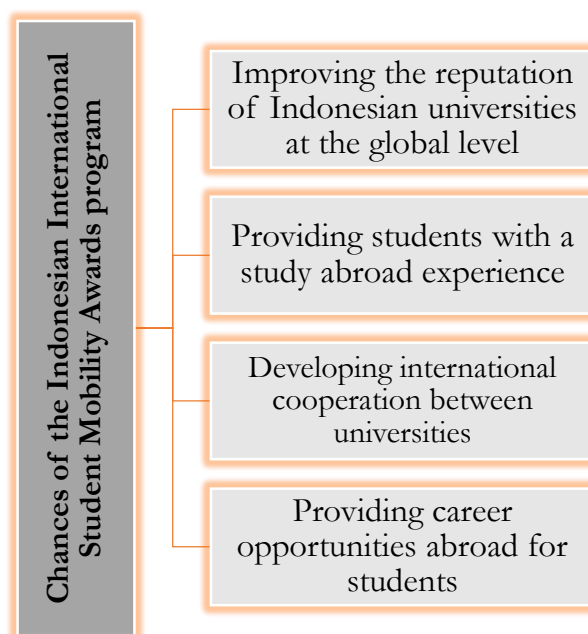
Fig 3. Chances of the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards program

Furthermore, the four challenges as found above will be discussed by presenting a small number of quotes with several informants who state these themes. After the interview excerpts are presented, the author strengthens them by analyzing them with various expert opinions and synthesizing them with previous research related to this issue in a similar context and issue.

Improving the reputation of Indonesian universities at the global level

Improving the reputation of Indonesian universities at the global level requires a comprehensive strategy. For example, it is necessary to improve the quality of education that can be achieved through curriculum development that is relevant to global standards, inviting international guest lecturers, and increasing the number of scientific publications in international journals. Furthermore, cooperation with the

world's top universities through student and lecturer exchange programs, international conferences, and the development of dual degree programs are also very important (Collins & Park, 2016; Fernandes et al., 2022).

In addition, universities and study programs should be encouraged to achieve international standard accreditation such as Accreditation Agency for Study Programmes in Engineering, Informatics, Natural Sciences and Mathematics (ASIIN) and Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBA) and follow global higher education standards such as ISO 9001, of course, with this international recognition will increase the credibility of Indonesian universities in global rankings (Altbach et al., 2009; Usoh et al., 2018).

In fact, the Indonesian international student mobility awards program is a golden opportunity to improve the reputation of universities in the future, as stated by (informants 5 & 9) in the following interview excerpt;

> *... The Indonesian international student mobility awards program is one of the opportunities for Indonesian universities at the global level.*

Indonesian international student mobility awards are very beneficial not only for the awardees, but Indonesia in general. Imagine having so many "ambassadors" representing the face of Indonesia to not only educate people about Indonesia but to also increase people to people contact in this global era. Therefore, those who become Indonesian international student mobility awards should adhere to our Indonesian values and to represent Indonesia wherever they go (Dawya & Okvitawanli, 2023; Sudarwati et al., 2024).

Providing students with a study abroad experience

Scholarship recipients will receive a one-semester to one-year study abroad experience, as well as the opportunity to develop their English language skills, leadership skills, and international network. The program also facilitates students to participate in academic, research, and cultural activities in the destination country, thus broadening their horizons and competitive abilities at the global level. Thus, the Indonesian international student mobility awards program contributes significantly to the development of quality and globally competitive Indonesian human resources. As stated by informant (8) in the following interview excerpt;

> *...I am glad I had the opportunity to join this program because it opened the door for me to experience global quality education. I learned a lot about the latest technology and innovative research methods at overseas universities.*

Furthermore, informant 12 in the following interview excerpt stated;

> *... the experience of living abroad is very different from Indonesia. I learned to appreciate cultural diversity and develop adaptability, while it provided me with learning opportunities, but also expanded my professional network and international friendships.*

With globalization and technological advancements, the work environment is constantly evolving. The international job market now demands individuals who are flexible, adaptable, innovative, and capable of managing various challenges. Young people are also expected to master both hard and soft skills to navigate the complexities of today's work landscape. International mobility offers young individuals the opportunity to broaden their perspectives, learn from professionals, and enhance their intercultural skills (Almeida & Santos, 2020). Therefore, Indonesian international student mobility awards for Vocational Students can be a valuable solution to address the challenges of a borderless, ever-changing work

environment and to prepare young professionals to contribute on a global scale (Hossain, 2023; Muttaqin et al., 2015; Simon, 2021).

The Indonesian international student mobility awards have provided an excellent opportunity for Indonesian students to get to know the world, its people and its culture. This has created strong ties and relationships between the communities and educational institutions of Ireland and Indonesia. Educational institutions in Ireland provide Indonesian students with a superior education in an English-speaking European environment, while living in Ireland will provide Indonesian students with the opportunity to study in a multicultural environment and connect with students from all over the world (Dawya & Okvitawanli, 2023).

Providing opportunities for our students to become global citizens while preserving their cultural heritage is essential. The Indonesia international student mobility awards program aims to nurture these qualities by broadening our students' global perspectives, helping them acquire new skills in a multicultural environment, and enabling them to form friendships and build international networks. The Indonesia international student mobility awards serves as a means of enhancing the quality of human resources. The international student mobility awards program offers students the right and opportunity to study at top universities abroad for one semester. By experiencing education across different campuses, the program aims to help bridge the gap between domestic and international higher education systems (Sudarwati et al., 2024).

Developing international cooperation between universities

After running for four years, the international student mobility awards program has opened up extensive opportunities for the development of international cooperation between universities. Through this program, Indonesian students can participate in student exchange programs at the world's top universities, strengthen global academic networks, and expand research collaboration opportunities.

The international student mobility awards program also facilitates the exchange of ideas, culture, and technology between countries, thus strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations between higher education institutions. Thus, this program not only improves the quality of education, but also strengthens Indonesia's position in the global academic arena (Hossain, 2023; Waham et al., 2023). As stated by informant (6) in the following interview excerpt;

...International cooperation opens the door for me to experience global quality education.

Furthermore, Informant 8 in the following interview excerpt stated;

...Indonesian universities should take this opportunity because international cooperation will expand research collaboration globally to develop various things such as technology development.

We need to provide opportunities for our students to become global citizens without being uprooted from their own culture. Indonesia international student mobility awards is a program to cultivate those skills, widen the perspective of our students with a global outlook, learning new skills in a multicultural setting, making friendships and developing international networking (Guo-Brennan & Guo-Brennan, 2020).

Providing career opportunities abroad for students

The international student mobility awards program has opened up golden opportunities for Indonesian students to develop careers abroad. Through the experience of studying at the world's best universities, students can gain valuable

knowledge, skills and global networks. The program prepares students to become competitive professionals, think critically, and adapt to the latest cultures and technologies. Thus, students can expand their employment opportunities in multinational companies, international organizations, and global higher education institutions. In other aspects, international student mobility awards also facilitate students to build a strong professional network, develop English language skills, and gain international recognition which is crucial for career success in the era of globalization. Therefore, the international student mobility awards program is a golden opportunity for Indonesian students to start a brilliant career in the international arena (Beech, 2015; Gutema et al., 2024; Tran, 2016). As stated by Informant 5 in the following interview excerpt:

> ...*This program has opened doors for me to develop my career abroad. I received a job offer from the college where I was placed after completing the program.*

The Indonesian international student mobility awards is one of the major programs of the *Merdeka Belajar* Program, which offers all Indonesian students the opportunity to experience studying at leading universities abroad (Lokkesmoe et al., 2016; Madrah et al., 2019; Song, 2018). Participating in this program will enrich students' knowledge and insight from various aspects of science, culture and academic environment, and various values and social environment. Students will gain invaluable international experience to enhance their ability to think, analyze and process information in a globalized world. Learning about different perspectives and worldviews helps them be more open and quickly adapt to global challenges and demands. This character is essential and needed for our young generation in building the nation (Susanti et al., 2024).

Indonesian international student mobility awards prepares students for a culturally diverse and multidisciplinary future of work. All Indonesian undergraduates are eligible to apply for a full semester scholarship to study in top overseas universities while interning in reputable companies, and are encouraged to enroll in courses outside their major (Beech, 2015; Rachman et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The Indonesian international student mobility awards program is a strategic opportunity for Indonesian students to develop their academic and professional skills through study abroad experiences. Although faced with challenges such as fierce competition, financial limitations and cultural differences, the program offers a great opportunity to improve the quality of Indonesian higher education, build a global reputation and develop quality human resources. With the right solutions, such as improving cooperation and program management, the Indonesian international student mobility awards program can be an important catalyst for Indonesia's educational and economic development.

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DECLARATIONS
Author contribution
Quratul Akyuni: Conceptualization, Writing-Original, **Engkizar:** Methodology, **Muhammad Alhadi:** draft preparation and Editing **Sartika**

Syamer: Validation Data curation, **Novela Witri** Visualization, **Khairiyah & Husni Mulyawati:** Supervision.

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