CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

This chapter includes the background of the research, which describes the topic in this research and why the researcher got interested in the case, the research question, the research purposes, and the research significance of the study.

1.1 Background of The Research

Students must have four essential competencies in the 21st century. The coalition P21 (Partnership for 21st Century Learning) has identified four skills for today: Firstly, critical thinking and problem-solving are considered one of the most valued skills in the workplace, especially in a competitive, knowledge-based economy. Critical thinking and problem-solving involve the ability to reason effectively through inductive and deductive methods and the ability to solve different kinds of non-familiar problems in both conventional and innovative ways. Secondly, creativity includes using a wide range of idea-creation techniques to create new and worthwhile ideas both incremental and radical concepts. Thirdly, communication skills incorporate articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written, and nonverbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts in diverse environments. Fourthly, the ability to work collaboratively assume shared responsibility for collaborative work, and values the individual contributions made by each team member.

A 21st-century education gives students the skills they need to succeed in this world and the confidence to put those skills into practice. With so much information available,

21st-century skills focus more on making sense of it and using it intelligently. There is a demand for skills in the twenty-first century, which prompted the Minister of Education and Indonesian Culture, Nadiem Makarim, to launch a program called Merdeka Belajar - Kampus Merdeka (MB-KM), which is expected to be the answer to these demands. MB-KM (Independent Learning - Independent Campus) is a form of independent and flexible learning in higher education that aims to foster a creative, independent, student-centered learning culture.

MB-KM has become a government strategy specified in Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 3 of 2020, addressing National Standards for Higher Education (*Berita Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 2020 Nomor 47*). The successful implementation of these policies relies on the collaborative efforts of universities and students, but there are challenges in this process. Universities often face difficulties in establishing supporting facilities and infrastructure required to enforce these regulations effectively. As the program's target audience, students require direction, comprehension, and strong motivation for program activities to be carried out under the intended aims. Therefore, it is critical to understand whether or not MB-KM activities have been appropriately implemented. These policies and activities cannot be implemented unless the study program manages the MB-KM program and students participate actively.

One of the programs that universities need to prepare for is *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM). *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM) or Independent Student Exchange is a one-semester student exchange from one regional cluster to another that gives a diverse experience and 20 credits in transfer systems. The student exchange program is expected to allow students to expand scientific subjects not covered in their

study programs. Another advantage is that student exchange program participants will have strong self-efficacy when learning online if they can manage their time, communicate well, confess that they have issues and require assistance, and have a supportive infrastructure. Student exchange is one of the popular off-campus activities among students. Students in batch 1 can take classes at any university, and they also have the option to study offline at another university for one semester. As a result, students can learn new knowledge and experience a different environment on other campuses. However, they are all based on a government-arranged collaboration arrangement. Each college will synchronize the scores and credits earned abroad. Based on the information above, the writer would like to know more concerning student perspectives of the MB-KM program student exchange and the issues students confront about the MB-KM student exchange.

The students' experience participating in the PMM is a point on which the researcher will focus, mainly at *Universitas Jambi*. *Universitas Jambi* is one of the academic institutions that consistently conduct academic-based activities related to the new regulation issued by the Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makarem. As one of the class A study programs at *Universitas Jambi*, students of the English Education Department in 2020 sent five students to participate in the PMM Program. In 2022, as many as 16 English Education Department students returned to participate in the activity.

The researcher also had a personal experience while participating the PMM program at *Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo*. Online learning was implemented during half of the semester, whereas the rest of the semester was offline learning. This is due to the Covid-19 pandemic, which has hit Indonesia since March 2020. Following Minister of the Ministry of Education and Culture Circular Letter No. 3662/MPK.A/HK/2020 dated March

17, 2020, regarding online learning and working from home to prevent COVID-19, learning activities are carried out online or remotely (Dewi, 2020). This will affect the implementation of policies MB-KM in the study program that runs. This happened because there was still a lack of debriefing for students during the program resulting in students' complexity in adapting to the new environment. Distance learning is learning outside the classroom, without face-to-face interaction, using an internet connection (Kusuma & Hamidah, 2020). Distance learning is done as a solution to avoid the spread of Covid-19. However, distance learning also creates problems for students. Lecture assignments given to students more than offline lectures cause academic burnout, so students often feel stress and emotional exhaustion (Orpina & Prahara, 2019). In addition, the environmental conditions of students, which do not support the learning process during distance learning, are also a problem for students in learning (Dharmayana & Pratami, 2019).

When online learning is applied during this program, students must access e-learning, known as SPADA, prepared by the Directorate General of Learning and Student Affairs of the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education to increase equitable access to quality learning in higher education. However, it is very unfortunate that students who will take part in the PMM in batch one is still not aware of the online learning system. During the implementation of the program, several errors occurred, which prevented students from accessing the web so that students could not submit assignments on time and could not make attendance. In batch one, several universities that participated in the activity allowed their students to take part in offline activities after half a semester due to the demands of students to take and complete the *Modul Nusantara* course, which aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of diversity, national insight and love for the

homeland. It includes four activities: cultural exchange, inspiration, reflection, and social contribution. The course format is in the form of social contribution actions such as raising funds in public places and for cultural exchanges requiring students to participate in cultural festivals. Students are free to perform performances that show the customs and culture of their respective regions. In batch 2, the same thing is still being applied, requiring students to follow and complete the *Modul Nusantara* course, but for batch 2 itself, from the beginning of the semester, they are required to take this program offline.

Based on researcher experience during an exchange program at *Universitas Muhammadiyah Sidoarjo*, it was also found that several obstacles were found in the way students adapt to the new environment and the cultural interactions experienced by the participants of the PMM program. According to Koentjaraningrat (2005), culture is the total of human thoughts, works, and results that do not come from instincts. It can only be produced after humans carry out the learning process. Students who come from various regions will be placed in one residence. Of course, they will continue to interact until the program is finished. This interaction then becomes a separate culture in the group's social life. One of the consequences of social interaction is the existence of cross-cultures between one culture and another, which in turn impacts intercultural contact. The values contained in each culture become a reference for human attitudes and behavior as individual beings. Socio-cultural interactions in society do not always run smoothly. Cross-cultural problems in plural (heterogeneous) and pluralistic (pluralistic) societies often stem from the interaction between communities, gaps in knowledge levels, social status, geography, and customs.

A study conducted by Nurjannah Abna, Nurmiati Muchlis, Rezki Aulia Yusuf, Awaluddin Syamsu & Ishaq Shamad (*Universitas Muslim Indonesia*, 2022) stated threats in the implementation of the MB-KM-Student Exchange Program are the difficulty and lack of supporting lecturers in understanding the cultural background of new students. Therefore, the researcher will explore student perceptions of the MB-KM program, particularly PMM, and the challenges students face during the English learning process in program implementation.

Based on the research that has been mentioned, the problems are an intriguing topic to investigate because there are differences in the learning implementation and English learning outcomes during the learning process in the student exchange program. The findings of this study can be used for the Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) of universities to create Rencana Pembelajaran Semester (RPS) and to suggest student exchange programs for future MB-KM activities.

From the consideration above, the researcher proposes a proposal entitled "Student Experiences of Participating in the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (PMM) Program: A Study of English Department Students in one of the Universities in Jambi" where the researcher focuses on how are the English learning process experienced by English Department Students while participating in the PMM.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the problems stated previously, here are the research questions:

1. What are the students' challenges during the English learning process while participating *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program?

2. How do the students overcome those challenges while participating *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program?

1.3 Research Purposes

Based on the Research Question, here are the research Purposes:

1. To explore the challenges during the English learning while participating *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program so that universities can make new policies to support the learning achievements of both internal and exchange students.

2. To investigate how participants of the *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* program dealing those challenges at their host university.

1.4 Research Significance

Based on the explanation above, this study's results are helpful from a theoretical and practical point of view. This study is expected to add information that is still unknown and related to this program in the selection process and how it is implemented for students who want to participate. The results of this study are expected to be used by the government to improve the quality of education during the pandemic by implementing this PMM program. This study can also make policies and Standard Operation Procedures (SOP) for universities related to formulating academic and social activities that can support the learning achievements of both internal and exchange students.

1.5 Limitations of the Research

This study focuses on students' English learning experience while participating in the PMM batch 2, especially students of the English Department at one of the public

universities in Jambi. This includes the learning implementation, the challenges participants face while participating in the PMM program and how the participants face those challenges. In this case, the researcher will conduct the interviews with the research participants until the data obtained is saturated.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

a. Student Experience: According to Williams (1983), The notion of the student experience is widely used to describe and make sense of the norms and expectations attached to contemporary higher education.

b. Experience: According to Irawan and Farid (2000), experience is a process of learning that affects change in an individual's behavior.

c. Participation: According to Oxford English Dictionary, participation is defined as taking part, associating or sharing (with others) in some action or matter.

d. Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka: According to Kemendikbudristek (2021), *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* is a domestic student exchange program in Indonesia that offers one-semester opportunities for students to gain diverse learning experiences and transfer 20 credits between different regional clusters.

e. Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka: According to Kemendikbudristek(2020), *Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka* (MB-KM) is an innovation crafted by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. It has been introduced as a policy aimed at transforming the higher education system in Indonesia to generate graduates who are more closely aligned with current educational needs and demands.