

The concept of “Kampus Merdeka” within the current policy of Indonesian higher education: ELT lecturers’ perspectives

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Abstract: *This study aims to advance global readers’ understanding of current Indonesian higher education policy associated with students’ rights. The researcher conducted document analysis on official regulations and interviewed lecturers to gain data about their response on the policy. The most obvious findings to emerge from this study that the Indonesian government tries to address the global challenges of higher education by transforming the paradigm of learning limited not to only classroom activities, instead providing flexibility for students to learn outside the classroom. Students should have flexibility to explore their competences by applying directly to either the societies or workplaces. Students should realise that experience is the best life-teacher to lead them to be independent and strong individuals. Learning should not always take place in the classroom; however, every place can be a medium for learning, since nature is the source of learning. Regardless the participants’ views on the current policy as the impacts neoliberal ideology, this transformation is supposed to provides positive impacts not only on students’ personal but also social, academic, and ethical domains by balancing their academic and social lives. In addition, the current policy is also intended to prepare students to respond global competitiveness and rapidly transforming societies, workplaces, and environments by mastering demanding competencies in the 21st century. Therefore, rapidly curriculum adjustment is always needed in responding any social phenomena that may significantly affect the policy making of educational system, as contextualised by the present study from Indonesian context dealing with the demands to conduct ELT curriculum adjustment as the response on the current policy. The implications of the findings are further discussed.*

Keywords: *Higher education; Indonesian higher education policy; Kampus Merdeka; Students’ rights*

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a fundamental role in producing, developing, and disseminating knowledge (Ren & Li, 2013; Teferra & Altbachl, 2004). All higher education institutions across the globe work hard to deal with such issues in order to respond to global competitiveness by demonstrating their excellence in teaching, research and community services (Bravo et al., 2018; Ghannam, 2007; Waghid, 2002). Such endeavours are aimed at providing all students with excellent academic experiences, to the benefit of their future careers. To achieve this aim, higher education institutions have to design appropriate curricula to meet the challenges of the 21st century, where information technology and communication dominate the educational sector. Higher education graduates need to be ready for global competitiveness by comprehending 21st-century skills; this proficiency is also known as ‘global competency’ (Fox, 2019). Therefore, recent developments in the field of higher education have led to a renewed

interest in developing curricula covering 21st-century skills (Beattie et al., 2013). This is supported by recent evidence of a growing number of publications focusing on the importance of 21st-century skills for higher education students (e.g. Khlaisang & Songkram, 2019; Fox, 2019; Kivunja, 2014; Brian, 2016; and many more).

Regardless of the complexity of Indonesian higher education (Azra, 2008), see also Riadi (2019) the Indonesian English curriculum changes, the Indonesian government has been trying to address the aforementioned global demands, working hard to improve the quality of higher education across Indonesia by addressing 21st-century skills in the higher education curriculum. Several concepts have been implemented to achieve the goals of national education standards – for example, the KKNi curriculum (standing for *Kurikulum Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia*) in higher education (Solikhah & Budiharso, 2019; Yuwono, 2019). This curriculum aims to prepare higher education students to be qualified graduates who comprehend 21st-century skills, and can compete with other graduates across the globe. Its implementation is in line with the official regulation of Presidential Decree No. 8, 2012. To date, since this endorsement was officially ratified, all higher education institutions across Indonesia have been struggling to develop their own KKNi curriculum, with some still unable to develop one appropriately. In addition, the existing literature also indicates that very few published studies have yet addressed this issue (Solikhah & Budiharso, 2019; Yuwono, 2019).

As the institutions struggle to develop their new curriculum, another related and challenging issue is approaching. On 24 January 2020, the new Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture (known as *Mendikbud*, standing for *Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*), Nadiem Makarim officially released a concept for higher education in Indonesia, namely *Kampus Merdeka* (Independent Campus or Campus Freedom). This policy refers to a breakthrough established by the Indonesian government to accelerate the achievement of higher education goals in accordance with the KKNi curriculum concept. It consists of four policies; namely 1) the requirements for opening a new study programme; 2) the higher education accreditation system; 3) the legal status of state higher education; and 4) students' right to study for three semesters outside their study programme. This current policy aims at changing the educational paradigms to become more autonomous and independent with an innovative learning culture. It appears to promote the notion of academic freedom in a higher education context (Hogan & Trotter, 2013; McCrae, 2011; Williams, 2006; Zain-Al-Dien, 2016; Zepke, 2012). This current policy completely challenges KKNi curriculum designers to accommodate the concept of *Kampus Merdeka*.

Debates concerning this current policy will soon attract either Indonesian or international scholars' attention. This policy is relatively very new (announced on 24 January 2020) and no published study found provides information on this policy – this may be the first. This situation makes this a really fascinating issue which might attract the global readership of those concerned with discussing current higher education policy across the world, especially Indonesian context. Therefore, this paper tries to fill the gaps by; 1) discussing some of the prominent ideas which relate to the issue of students' rights in the concept of *Kampus Merdeka*; and 2) examining how Indonesian English lecturers respond to this current policy. This study does not comprehensively discuss all of the aforementioned four policies covered by *Kampus Merdeka*; it focuses only on discussing students' rights issues, since this certainly relates to KKNi curriculum development – still a struggle for some universities to deal with. In order to provide an exciting opportunity

to gain insight into the current policy, this study sought to answer the following specific research questions:

- 1) *What are the new policy directives concerning to the issue of students’ rights for studying for three semesters outside of their study programme?*
- 2) *How do ELT lecturers in Indonesian Islamic higher education respond to the current policy?*

RESEARCH METHOD

By employing qualitative modes of enquiry, this study attempts to illuminate the nature and responses of English lecturers towards the students’ rights to study three semesters outside of their study programme stated in the Kampus Merdeka. To achieve the goals, the researcher chose document analysis (Bowen, 2009; Cohen et al., 2007) as the most appropriate to collect data for answering the first research question. In this case, any official regulation documents related to the current policy published by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture were analysed, such as the Permendikbud Number 3 Year 2020, and the handout of Merdeka Belajar: Kampus Merdeka. Both are accessible and downloadable from the official Indonesian higher education website. In addition, to answer the second research question, the researcher conducted semi-structured interview (Sandy & Shen, 2019) with ten active ELT lecturers in Islamic higher education institutions across Indonesia (see Table 1). The ten were chosen randomly and voluntarily after circulating research participation invitation through Google Form in social media and accepting their signed consent forms. Actually, fourteen potential participants fulfilled the google form and provided their signed consent forms; however, only ten were interviewed as four of them requested to be withdrawn before getting interviewed due to confidential reasons. The interview session took approximately 45 to 90 minutes for each interviewee and all of them were recorded and transcribed in order to ease the analysis processes.

Furthermore, the six-step procedure of document analysis proposed by O’Leary (2017) was applied by the researcher. The six steps are planning, gathering, reviewing, interrogating, reflecting/refining, and analysing data. Firstly, the researcher searched any documents associated with the current policy of Indonesian higher education regarding students’ rights to study for three semesters outside of their study programme. Permendikbud Number 3 Year 2020 and the handout of Merdeka Belajar: Kampus Merdeka were directly downloaded and printed to making them easier for researchers to annotate – part of the data-gathering step. Then, the documents were repeatedly reviewed and reread in order to avoid any bias from either the author or researcher (O’Leary, 2017) that might make a negative impact on data interpretation. After that, the two documents were interrogated by extracting their contents; in other words, they were annotated in order to identify any themes and keywords (words or phrases) associated with the answers to the research questions. Last but not least, all of the previous steps were evaluated repeatedly in order to uncover missing data or data misinterpretation.

For the data analysis, all data obtained from the aforementioned documents and interview sessions were analysed based on the thematic analysis technique (Bowen, 2009; O’Leary, 2017). Using this approach, the researcher carefully read the documents and listened the interview recording many times in order to familiarise himself with the data

within them, highlighting any keywords in terms of words, phrases, and sentences that may be related to the research questions. This process was repeatedly conducted for the whole data analysis process (O’Leary, 2017). After becoming familiar with the documents and interview recording, the researcher created applicable categories or codes relating to both research questions. Any statements found in the documents and the recording referring to the aforementioned categories were listed and grouped. After that, the listings and groupings were analysed again and again in order to make sure whether or not the data related to the categories. Next, the data was analysed again (the in-depth review) by including data appropriate to the answers of the research questions – and excluding inappropriate data. Finally, all the data associated with the categories were defined as the answers (also known as the findings) of the research questions.

Table 1. *Participants’ basic profile*

Name	University (pseudonyms)*	Gender	Final Academic Degree	Academic Position
L1	Timurung	M	Doctor TESOL	Professor
L1	Lomponene	F	Ph.D. TESOL	Professor
L3	Timurung	M	Doctor TESOL	Associate Professor
L4	Labissa	M	Ph.D. TESOL	Associate Professor
L5	Pollawareng	F	Ph.D. TESOL	Associate Professor
L6	Pacciro	F	MA TESOL	Assistant Professor
L7	Pompanua	M	M, TESOL	Assistant Professor
L8	Labissa	M	M, TESOL	Assistant Professor
L9	Pollawareng	F	M.Pd (Master of Education)	Assistant Professor
L10	Lomponene	F	M, TESOL	Lecturer

*Names of countryside in author’s hometown

FINDINGS

The section presents and discusses the findings of the research, focusing on the themes that answer the research questions, as presented and discussed in the following section:

What are the new policy directives concerning to the issue of students’ rights for studying for three semesters outside of their study programme?

After analysing the existing documents, it was found three new policy directives covered within the concept of Kampus Merdeka associated with university students’ rights (see Table 2), as presented and discussed in the following themes:

Students’ right to take some modules outside of their department

The first new policy directive states that Indonesian higher education institutions must provide students with the right to take some modules outside of their department. The rights refer to the ability for students (1) to take credits outside of their university for two semesters (equivalent to 40 credits), and (2) to take equally 20 credits in different study programmes in the same university for one semester. Such rights are optional, depending on whether or not students want to take them up. This new policy is intended to address the current situation in higher education institutions, in which students do not

have much flexibility to take classes outside of their own study programmes and campuses due to the obligatory to take eight-semester modules in their study programme.

The obligation for students to take credits from five semesters in their own study programme

The second current policy directive is the obligation for students from any study programme, excluding health, to take credits from five semesters in their own study programme – this is related to the existing criterion. Referring to the previous directive, students are officially allowed to take credits for two semesters at another university, and one semester in another study programme at the same university, so students are required to take credits for only five semesters in their own study programmes – a total of eight semesters would include two semesters at another university, one in another study programme at the same university, and five in their own study programme.

Redefining the terminology of “credit”

Connecting to the previous policies, the Indonesian educational authority also decided to redefine the terminology of “credit”; this occupies the third new policy directive. The legal basis for this policy directive refers to Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3 of 2020 concerning National Standards for Higher Education. In this case, the Indonesian government prefers to define credit based on *activity hours*, instead of *learning hours*. So far, credit has been defined only in terms of *learning hours*, where interaction among students and lecturers occurs in a classroom. In other words, the previous definition is limited to face-to-face learning in the classroom. In fact, the learning process of students is not limited to classroom activities. In the new scheme, students are given the right to voluntarily carry out activities outside their study programme, even outside of university, which can be calculated in the credits. This directive is supposed to provide a student-friendly atmosphere in which there is no longer any need to postpone graduation because of joining specific academic programmes. Also, it is supposed to create an independent learning and cross interdisciplinary learning culture.

Table 2. *The current policy directives of Indonesian higher education (Adopted from Kemendikbud, 2020)*

Current situation		New policy directives
1.	Students do not have much flexibility to take classes outside of their own study programme and campus.	Higher education institutions must provide the right for students to voluntarily (optional): 1. take credits outside of their university for two semesters (equivalent to 40 credits); and 2. take credits at different study programmes in the same university for at most one semester (equivalent to 20 credits).
2.	The weight of credits for learning activities outside the classroom remains very small, and this is unfair for students who have sacrificed a lot of time	Following the previous directive, the credits that must be taken by students at their own study programme are five semesters of the total semesters that must be taken (this regulation does not apply to health study programmes)
3.	On many campuses, student exchanges or work practices	Redefining the terminology of credits:

actually delay student graduation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. credit is defined as “<i>an activity hour</i>”, not “<i>a learning hour</i>”. 2. definition of “<i>activity</i>” can be in forms of classroom learning, internship (internship), student exchange, village projects, entrepreneurship, research, independent study, and teaching activities in remote areas. All types of selected activity must be supervised by a lecturer appointed by the university. 3. A list of “<i>activities</i>” that can be taken by students (in the three semesters above) can be selected from: (a) a programme determined by the government, (b) a programme approved by the chancellor
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Following the current terminology of credit, the current policy states several fundamental activities can be conducted by students to engage with the policy. All activities should be decided by the government, approved by the rector, and guided by lecturers. The activities are presented in Table 3 as follows;

Table 3. *Examples of student activities that can be carried out outside the home university (Adopted from Kemendikbud, 2020)*

	Activities	Descriptions	Notes
1.	Internship	It can be carried out in a company, non-profit foundation, multilateral organisation, government institution, or start-up company.	It must be supervised by a lecturer.
2.	Social project in the countryside	It aims at helping societies in the countryside or rural areas to have better lives by improving their economy, infrastructure, and so on.	It can be done by collaborating with the village apparatus or other village organisations.
3.	Teaching at school	It can be conducted in any school levels (elementary, junior, and senior high schools) in either the city or remote areas.	It will be facilitated by the Ministry of Education and Culture
4.	Student exchange	It can be done by taking modules either in an Indonesian university or an overseas one that has cooperated with Indonesian government.	Students’ scores and credits from visited universities will be converted by Indonesian universities.
5.	Doing research	It refers to an academic research activity in the fields of sciences and social sciences.	It can be conducted for Indonesian research institutions such as <i>Indonesian Institute of Sciences</i> or <i>Indonesian National Research and Innovation Agency</i> .
6.	Entrepreneur activity	It deals with entrepreneurial activities developed independently by students, proven by proposal and documentation from any transactions that they have, such as employee salary slips.	It must be supervised by a lecturer.
7.	Independent study or project	It refers to any projects associated with social topics developed by students (individually or in a group).	It must be supervised by a lecturer.

8.	Humanitarian project	It is national and international social activities for a foundation or humanitarian organisation approved by the university.	The examples of formal organisations that can be approved by the Chancellor are Indonesian Red Cross, Mercy Corps, and others.
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How do ELT lecturers in Indonesian higher education respond to the current policy?

The concept of students’ right in the Kampus Merdeka has been hotly debated since the government officially released it on 24 January 2020. A variety of perspectives of the participants towards the current policy could be grouped into the following themes:

Positive impacts for ELT students

A common view amongst interviewees was that the current policy provides several positive impacts on students’ personal, social, academic, and ethical domains. In this matter, they are given freedom to develop both their soft and hard skills, ‘*good to develop students soft and hard skills (L8)*’. It also gives students flexibility to develop their competencies by taking some modules in other universities. Such scheme provides them a good chance to establish their network outside their university, as participant L5 and L7 respectively said: ‘*taking courses in other university will ease students to build their academic networking*’ and ‘*it is good for students’ academic networking*’. It will also encourage them to actively hunt student exchange programs in international level; as participant L3 said: ‘*ELT students will be motivated to join international students exchanges since it will not deter their graduation*’. In addition, it also provides chances students to voluntarily engage in community service , as participant L1, L2, and L4 respectively commented: ‘*it is the time for students to play their role as social change agents*’, ‘*countryside completely needs scholars’ contribution*’, and ‘*students’ civic engagement will mature their interpersonal and intrapersonal skills*’.

Overall, these findings provide some tentative initial evidence that the majority of participants considered student’s rights within the concept of Kampus Merdeka as a good concept. It might further indicate that the current policy tries to address the global issues questioning scholars’ contribution as a social constructor toward civic engagement and development as hotly debated recently.

Students’ competencies

When asking about what competencies are required by students to deal with the current policy, several fundamental competencies are suggested by the participants, as presented on the following comments.

Based on my understanding on the current policy, I do believe that competencies such as collaboration, critical thinking, leadership and social responsibilities are truly required by students (L1).

They should be creative thinker (L2).

We need to develop students’ collaboration, problem solving, and communication competencies (L4).

I suggest problem solving, critical thinking, communication and collaboration (L5).

The current policy requires students to be critical thinkers, good collaborators and communicators. It also improves students' sense of social responsibilities (L6).

Having social responsibilities, leadership, problem solving, communication, and collaboration competencies will ease students to provide positive impacts on society development (L7).

The most fundamental competencies required by the current policy are leadership, collaboration, communication, and social responsibilities (L9).

Students need critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, social responsibilities, and communication competencies in order to balance their academic and social lives (L10).

In summary, these results show that the overwhelming majority of participants propose seven competencies that need to be comprehended by students – they are *collaboration, communication, social responsibilities, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, and creative thinking* (ordered based the frequency mentioned by participants).

Curriculum adjustment

Concerns were also expressed about ELT curriculum adjustments. This theme came up for example in discussions of the biggest challenge in the initial stage of the implementation of the current policy. Some examples of the comments are displayed as follows;

We should reform again our curriculum as we have to provide two curriculum schemes; optional for tree semester courses and compulsory for five semester courses (L1).

Learning outcomes stated in the current KKNI-based ELT curriculum should be reformed to adjust the current policy (L3).

ELT curriculum should adjust the current policy to provide English courses for non-ELT students as I do believe that ELT department will be one of the most targeted ones for those who want to improve their English. It truly needs in-depth and time-consuming need analysis (L4).

ELT departments needs adjust their curriculum as lots of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses should be included (L5).

To deal with the policy, ELT department need to conduct massive curriculum adjustments that demanding English courses and competencies for students from other majors (L7).

Inevitably, ELT curriculum should be adjusted to cover some ESP courses as many students from other departments will be interested in taking that course. It may drive ELT curriculum designers to work hard (L9).

This current policy challenge each ELT department should offer several ESP courses for non-English students and some increasingly vital skills in the 21st century (L10).

What emerges from the results reported here is that it is predicted that ELT department will be one of targeted departments for non-English students from other departments. Therefore, there is seemingly a need for ELT departments to offer several ESP courses to those who want to take same English courses from other departments. Also, learning outcomes stated in the current curriculum need to be reformulated to accommodate the aforementioned competencies.

Neoliberalism

Surprisingly, other recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense amongst interviewees that the current policy seemingly adapts neoliberal ideology. This theme came up in discussions of the possible ideology underpinning the current policy. Some comments are displayed as follows;

The current policy seemingly adapts neoliberal concepts (L1).

I personally view that the current policy is affected by the concept of neoliberalism, by which students are mostly prepared to be a worker, not as a thinker (L2).

It seems like the current policy will marginalise the non-profit roles of tertiary education. It is how neoliberalism works (L3).

Government should carefully control implementation of the current policy because it is possible for some study programs to be commercialised by irresponsible people (L4).

Regardless the positive impacts of the current policy, it will give great chances for corporates to affect curriculum design of higher education (L7).

Creation of global market of educational services deems to be the main goals of the current policy (L8).

I hope the current policy does not drive universities to commercialise their study programs (L9).

DISCUSSION

What emerges from the document analysis reported here is that the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education and Culture, has tried to transform the paradigm of learning limited not to only classroom activities, instead providing flexibility for students to learn outside the classroom. The old paradigm puts students in an environment that does not challenge their curiosity to explore their creativity increasingly on the outside. It fails to give students more flexibility to join alternative academic programmes outside of their campuses which may help them to improve both their hard and soft skills (Khasanzyanova, 2017). Also, it seemingly limits the space for students to build academic networks in other universities. Students can take only whole modules normally organised for eight semesters by their study programme. During this period students might feel ups and downs with their time-consuming academic activities, and these are crucial times. The system seemingly limits student learning spaces to only the

classroom – they are not provided an opportunity to explore more learning processes in opened-up atmospheres. As a result, some students may feel stressed and under pressure, and this negatively contributes to their academic performance, even leading to failure. Therefore, the new policy is supposed to facilitate students' academic freedom by letting them take modules or activities outside of their campuses without this becoming a barrier to their finishing their studies.

What is surprising is that together these results provide important insights into the challenges presented to Indonesian higher education students to acquire 21st-century skills badly needed in this modern era by taking the academic and social activities outside of their university (Chand & Deshmukh, 2019). Students are challenged to be more critical in looking at social issues happening around them, a part of their social responsibilities. They are required to provide such community service or service learning that may make a positive impact on society (Tyndall et al., 2020). Student participation in the aforementioned activities will raise a new generation with a sense of caring and empathy for society. Such issue has been documented in literatures from the global context that students' extracurricular activities certainly bring positive impacts not only on students' personal but also social, academic, and ethical domains (e.g., Astin & Sax, 1998; Hooghe, 2003; Seider et al., 2011). It bridges students to be social change agents by conducting innovative social projects as a problem solving towards social gaps that occur in society. They can directly actualise their knowledge from university to provide positive contributions on societies' lives, balancing theory and practice. This finding reveals something about the nature of the concept of social constructivism suggesting that learning deals not simply with only for assimilating and accommodating new knowledge but also for applying the knowledge in the social interaction (Vygotsky, 1978).

Moving now to discuss competencies required by students to deal with the current policy. The majority of participants suggested seven competencies addressed by the current policy - they are *collaboration*, *communication*, *social responsibilities*, *critical thinking*, *problem solving*, *leadership*, and *creative thinking*. These findings support evidence from previous global studies such collaboration (McCafferty et al., 2006; Hess, 2001; Dörnyei & Murphey, 2003, communication (Celce-Murcia et al, 1995; Dörnyei, 1995; Dörnyei & Scott, 1997), social responsibilities (OECD, 2016; Goren & Yemini, 2017; Oxfam, 2015; Bourn, 2016), critical thinking (Joseph et al., 2007; Nokes et al., 2005; Butterworth et al., 2008; Ennis, 2015), problem solving (Davidson, 2002), leadership (Cress et al., 2001; Leuci et al., 2014; Tilstra, 2008), and creative thinking (Scott et al., 2004; Sternberg, 2006) that the aforementioned competencies are increasingly crucial for students in responding challenges such global competitiveness and rapidly transforming societies in the 21st century.

With respect to the aforementioned vital competencies and the biggest challenge in the initial stage of the implementation of the current policy pointed out by the participants, it can therefore be assumed that ELT departments are suggested to conduct massive curriculum adjustments to cover the aforementioned competencies and to offer several ESP courses for students from other departments. It is predicted that the policy will affect ELT departments to be invaded by many students from other departments to take some English courses for improving their English skills. A possible explanation for this might be that it may be affected by the power of English as an international language (Tan et al., 2020); as a result, English is viewed as one of fundamental skills that should be comprehended in order to connect with global community (Lee & Drajadi, 2019;

Morris & Maxey, 2014; Panero & Yu, 2014). Therefore, there is, regardless the complexities of conducting curriculum adjustments, a recognised need for ELT departments to adjust their curriculum by designing some innovative and demanding ESP courses to meet the goals of the current policy to respond the global demands.

These findings are somewhat surprising given the fact that the overwhelming majority of participants were particularly critical of the possible ideology underpinning the current policy. What unexpectedly emerges from the results is that neoliberal ideology originated from western countries seemingly have considerable impacts on education system in all sectors, including Indonesia higher education system. It is difficult to explain this result, but it might be related to concerns for participants about the profit-oriented education that is hotly debated in the global context, not only in Indonesia but also in other countries across the world in recent years. It is globally acknowledged that the function of higher education has shifted from producing knowledge to providing educational services for the global market's demand of labors. This study supports evidence from previous studies (e.g. Bacevic, 2019; Ball, 2015; Brennan, 2002; Giroux, 2014; Olssen, 2016; Schrecker, 2010) that the directives of higher education system seemingly tend to be more pragmatic and lose its identity as a place to produce, assimilate, and accommodate knowledge – it is more sensible to produce and sell educational services to corporates. However, with a small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings dealing with the issue of neoliberal ideology in the current policy might not be generalisable to a broader range of Indonesian context. It can only be a tentative initial evidence for future studies targeting large-scale participants across Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this study, this study aims to advance global readers' understanding on the current policy on students' rights within the concept of *Kampus Merdeka* in Indonesian higher education and how English language teaching lecturers respond it. The most obvious findings to emerge from this study that the Indonesian government tries to address the global challenges of higher education by transforming the paradigm of learning limited not to only classroom activities, instead providing flexibility for students to learn outside the classroom. Students should have flexibility to explore their competences by applying directly to either the societies or workplaces. Students should realise that experience is the best life-teacher to lead them to be independent and strong individuals. Learning should not always take place in the classroom; however, every place can be a medium for learning, since nature is the source of learning. Regardless the participants' views on the current policy as the impacts neoliberal ideology, this transformation is supposed to provides positive impacts not only on students' personal but also social, academic, and ethical domains by balancing their academic and social lives. In addition, the current policy is also intended to prepare students to respond global competitiveness and rapidly transforming societies, workplaces, and environments by mastering demanding competencies in the 21st century. Therefore, rapidly curriculum adjustment is always needed in responding any social phenomena that may significantly affect the policy making of educational system, as contextualised by the present study from Indonesian context dealing with the demands to conduct ELT curriculum adjustment as the response on the current policy.

These findings also make several contributions to the current literature. Firstly, it may be the first study documented in the literature addressing the current policy on students' rights within the concept of *Kampus Merdeka* in Indonesian higher education (announced on 24 January 2020). Also, it raises important practical issues that have a bearing on academic freedom for students in an Indonesian context, especially their freedom to take credits and/or social activities outside their study programme. In other words, the findings provide a new understanding of how the Indonesian government interprets academic freedom for students by giving them flexibility to learn outside the classroom setting. Finally, the issue of neoliberal ideology emerged in this study could be greatly tentative initial evidence for future researchers to explore more to what extent the ideology affects higher education, especially in Indonesian higher education context by involving large-scale participants across Indonesia.

Although this study has successfully demonstrated the new Indonesian higher education policy directives and how the ELT lecturers respond the policy, it is limited by the small number of cases that may not be applicable to wider population. Therefore, considering the aforementioned weakness, and the complete newness of the policy, several possible studies can be addressed to obtain deeper insights into this issue. Future researchers might examine numerous perspectives of people involved in the implementation of the policy, such as rectors, deans, heads of department and curriculum designers, – even students. These people can truly provide empirical data dealing with the policy's practice in the near future. In addition, further interesting research might be conducted through a large-scale survey involving wider participation from numerous universities across Indonesia's provinces.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest associated with this research.

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