



## NATION BRANDING THROUGH KNB SCHOLARSHIP AS SOFT POWER DIPLOMACY

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**Abstract:** This study aims to understand how the Developing Countries Partnership (KNB) Scholarship can be used as soft power and improve nation branding that resulted by internationalization of higher education. Using a descriptive approach and utilizing primary and secondary information and data, this research was also enriched by interviews with KNB Scholarship students. The result of this research is that the KNB Scholarship can spread positive views about Indonesia, relations development between countries, and the Indonesian economy promotion by foreign students in their countries. In addition, there are several issues that need to be addressed jointly by cross-stakeholders so that the KNB Scholarship can provide optimal benefits for students, Indonesia's universities, students' origin countries, and especially for Indonesia.

**Keywords:** Indonesia, soft power, nation branding, KNB (Kemitraan Negara Berkembang)

### INTRODUCTION

Indonesian government provides the Developing Countries Partnership Scholarship or Beasiswa Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB Scholarship) as one of instruments that support in strengthening international development cooperation strategy. This scholarship increase new sources and funding mechanisms for international development cooperation in 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan too. The KNB Scholarship is an implementation component of the program for strengthening higher education institutions quality at Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MOECRT) in the form of providing tuition assistance for foreign students who come from developing countries to study in Bachelor (S1), Postgraduate (S2) programs and Doctoral (S3) program in Indonesia's universities.

This scholarship was first introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1992. This scholarship initially served the strategic plan of the Ministry in the efforts to develop higher education able to embrace education globalization. The program provides financial assistance (scholarships) to selected universities in Indonesia to recruit prospective international students to get a master's degree. Recognizing the program's significant contribution to human resource development in developing countries bordering Indonesia, the Indonesian government decided to expand the scope of the program and increase the number of scholarships offered.

The Government of the Republic of Indonesia through the Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education has provided Developing Country Partnership Scholarships (KNB Scholarships) since 2006. This scholarship provided opportunities for prospective students in developing countries to increase their knowledge and competence by studying and obtaining master's degrees at 15 leading universities in Indonesia. KNB Scholarship recipients can experience life in the most culturally diverse country in the world and are expected to become academic-cultural agents to spread Indonesian culture and language and provide benefits for Indonesia's positive image.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Soft Power

Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion or payment. Nye (2005) states that a country's soft power capability relies primarily on three resources, namely its culture, its political values, and its foreign policy. Culture is a set of values and practices that create meaning for society. When a country's culture includes universal values and its policies promote the values and interests shared by others, it increases the possibility of achieving the desired outcome because of the interest and task relationships created by its culture.

The offer and provision of higher education for cross-border communities (student exchange) is seen as an excellent form of soft power in the cultural sphere. According to Knight & De Wit (2018), soft power diplomacy through education, especially higher education, involves the process of creating, sharing, and using knowledge for international relations and engagement. However, higher education diplomacy implementation must be seen as a reciprocal process, so that it is mutually beneficial and provides a two-way exchange.

Wojciuk et. al. (2015) states that the quality higher education sector is one of the important factors that contribute to the soft power of a country. The role of higher education in the prestige and international standing of a country has increased significantly in recent years, mainly due to the major transformation in the global economy and the corresponding shift in values, which have become ever more important in the modernization process.

### Nation Branding

Nowadays, countries around the world try to build their reputation up and strategically communicate their identities to the external environment (Angell & Mordhorst, 2015). Their national values and identities are used as resources in global competition between countries and a multidimensional blend of element such as history, nature, culture, and expression of identity that simultaneously form a country's brand (Sataøen, 2019).

However, nation branding is a multi-year process, that is complex and highly politicized because it includes various levels, dimensions, and disciplines beyond conventional branding (Johnston, 2008). A positive nation brand can 'act as a catalyst for sustainable development and competitive balance' because it can restore weak international credibility, increase international political influence, and stimulate stronger international partnerships (Dinnie, 2008). in line with this, Anholt (2007) states that if a country establishes a strong national branding, that image will attract talented people, such as international students from abroad. International students in higher education institutions are considered a potential source of image promotion for the host country.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a descriptive method by using primary and secondary data. The information in this study was also enriched from interviews with policy makers, universities sample and KNB Scholarship students respondents. This study aims to analyze the indepth information from the sample colleges that holding the KNB Scholarship and find issues the KNB Scholarship implementation as advice for improvement and development of a better the KNB Scholarship implementation

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

As one of the Indonesian government priority programs in higher education field, the KNB Scholarship aims to:

1. Cultural diplomacy to improve Indonesia's branding in the eyes of the world by providing an understanding of the culture and education system in Indonesia, especially higher education;
2. Contribute to human resources development in developing countries;
3. Promote deeper cultural understanding among developing countries;
4. Support boost Indonesian universities reputation at the international level; and
5. Strengthen relations and cooperation among developing countries.

KNB Scholarship program establishment is a follow-up to Indonesia's commitment delivered at the 10th Conference of Heads of States of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) held in Bandung on 1-6 September 1992. Initially, this scholarship was named the NAM Scholarship because it was only given to citizens of member countries. Over time, these scholarships were also awarded to citizens of the wider developing countries and their names became KNB Scholarships.

Based on Institutional Directorate of MOECRT (2021) data in 2019, the number of KNB Scholarship applicants reached 1,518 applicants from 94 countries. However, the total recipients in 2019 are 128 foreign students. If we sum up, the total recipients of the KNB Scholarship from 2008 to 2019 are 952 students, with countries receiving the KNB Scholarship from 97 countries.

**Tabel 1. Study Programs and Majors offered in KNB Scholarship**

Study Program	Majors	Study Program	Majors
Humanity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Humanity</li> <li>• Literary studies</li> <li>• Linguistics</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Philosophy</li> <li>• Anthropology</li> <li>• Cultural studies</li> </ul>	Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Biology</li> <li>• Physics</li> <li>• Geography</li> <li>• Chemistry</li> <li>• Remote Sensing</li> <li>• Computer</li> <li>• Mathematics</li> <li>• Statistics</li> <li>• Environmental Sciences</li> <li>• Public Health</li> <li>• Sports sciences</li> <li>• Pharmacy Studies</li> <li>• Nursing</li> </ul>
Engineering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chemical Engineering</li> <li>• Civil Engineering</li> <li>• Architectural Engineering</li> <li>• Electrical Engineering</li> <li>• Naval Architect &amp; Marine Engineering</li> <li>• Geological Engineering</li> <li>• Informatics Engineering</li> <li>• Environmental</li> <li>• Engineering</li> <li>• Mechanical Engineering</li> </ul>	Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indonesian Education</li> <li>• Educational Science</li> <li>• Social Science Education</li> <li>• Natural Science Education</li> <li>• Primary School Teacher Education</li> <li>• Out of School Education/ Informal Education</li> <li>• Applied Linguistics</li> <li>• History Education</li> <li>• Instructional Education</li> <li>• Educational Management</li> <li>• Educational Research &amp; Evaluation</li> <li>• Vocational &amp; Technology Education</li> </ul>
Social Sciences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public Administration</li> <li>• Political Science</li> <li>• Sociology</li> <li>• Psychology</li> <li>• Law</li> <li>• Economics/Development Study</li> <li>• Communication &amp; Media</li> <li>• Studies</li> </ul>		

- International Relations
- Accounting
- Management
- Community Empowerment

Source: MOECRT, 2021

Ten countries that sent KNB Scholarship student the most are from Thailand, Madagascar, Laos, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda, Sudan, Cambodia, Timor Leste, and China. And the most demanded study programs by KNB Scholarship students are Social sciences (34%), Education (25%), Engineering (14%), Applied Sciences (10%), Art Language and Culture (9%), Information Technology (5%), and Public Health and Pharmacy (3%).

The KNB Scholarship has two schemes, namely:

1. The KNB Scheme for Undergraduate, Postgraduate, and Doctoral Programs. This scheme is given to students from developing countries and other countries on the basis of bilateral diplomatic commitments approved by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
2. Postgraduate Program from ASEAN University Network/Southeast Asia Engineering Education Development Network (AUN/Seed-NET) Scheme. This scheme is given to foreign students from member countries of the AUN/Seed-Net educational network of engineering sciences to pursue postgraduate education at three Indonesian universities that are members of AUN/Seed-Net, namely Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB), Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology (ITS) and Gadjah Mada University (UGM).

The learning program structure at each program level is different. The Indonesian Language Training Program is Indonesian Language (Bahasa) Course program which is mandatory for all KNB that lasts for one year. Language courses will be provided by each university. Then, the Preparatory Program is a program that given before the Master or Bachelor program, will be arranged according to the university's policy and program planning. While the Academic Program is an academic learning program that lasts for 8 semesters for undergraduate, 4 semesters for postgraduate and 6 semesters for doctoral. To complete these programs, it is important for all KNB students to consistently produce good academic performance by developing a can-do attitude, staying focused, punctual, and disciplined.

The criteria for the KNB Scholarship as implementing partners universities are:

1. Minimum of B universities accreditation;
2. Being in cluster 1 or 2 in the related year's universities clusterin;
3. Have a minimum of 4 postgraduate study programs;
4. Having excellent supporting infrastructure for academic and non-academic activities;
5. Already have a unit that actively carries out the international affairs office functions; and
6. Apply to be KNB Scholarship executant to the Directorate General of Higher Education MOECRT.

In 2021, 23 of the best public and private universities in Indonesia will take part as implementing partners for KNB Scholarship. One of the specific goals of this scholarship is to encourage Indonesian higher education internationalization by increasing the number of foreign students studying at universities in Indonesia. And, those universities are:

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| 1. IPB University  | 13. Parahyangan Catholic University (Unpar)    |
| 2. Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB)                           | 14. University of Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM)    |
| 3. Sepuluh Nopember Institute of Technology (ITS)                  | 15. University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS) |
| 4. Electronic Engineering Polytechnic Institute of Surabaya (PENS) | 16. State University of Malang (UM)            |
|  | 17. State University of Semarang (Unnes)       |

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|---|---|
| 5. Airlangga University (Unair)           | 18. State University of Surabaya (Unesa)    |
| 6. Atma Jaya Yogyakarta University (UAJY) | 19. State University of Yogyakarta (UNY)    |
| 7. Brawijaya University (UB)              | 20. Padjajaran University (Unpad)           |
| 8. Diponegoro University (Undip)          | 21. Indonesia University of Education (UPI) |
| 9. Gadjah Mada University (UGM)           | 22. Sebelas Maret University (UNS)          |
| 10. Hasanuddin University (Unhas)         | 23. Telkom University                       |
| 11. Indonesia University (UI)             |   |
| 12. Islamic University of Indonesia (UII) |   |

The KNB Scholarship also supports strengthening People-to-People Contact through the South-South and Triangular Cooperation Framework to Support Trade and Investment as one of the policy directions in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan, namely strengthening international development cooperation through the SSTC strategy. Through people-to-people contact, Indonesia gets direct benefits, including improving a positive image and promoting Indonesian goods and services, especially through increases interaction between citizens of the two countries and promotional activities from word-of-mouth communication. Recommendations distributed by foreign students based on the experience they receive while studying and living in Indonesia will have a strong influence on decision-making by other parties, even compared to advertising promotions.

The expected benefit with KNB Scholarship implementation is an increase in the introduction and quality of higher education in Indonesia. A number of foreign students' presence at the host university is expected to contribute to the World-class University Rankings achievement. In addition, improving Indonesia's positive image is expected to encourage domestic universities to organize cooperation programs between Indonesian universities and universities at home and abroad. This is in line with the Independent Merdeka Belajar - Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy to encourage collaboration, one of which is with universities abroad.

From the results of interviews with sixteen foreign students who received the KNB Scholarship and two representatives from implementing partner universities, there are several issues related to KNB Scholarship implementation, such as:

1. There are complaints that the amount of allowances and tuition fees are too little for some cities. As it is known that the cost components and units of KNB Scholarship in each study program at each implementing partner universities have the same nominal. So that KNB Scholarship implementation, it becomes part of the cost sharing with the implementing partner universities.
2. The amount of scientific publication allowance is not enough for international publication needs. This scientific publication allowance is only given to KNB Scholarship students who are pursuing master's and doctoral programs. In 2021, the amount of allowance for publishing scientific articles for KNB Scholarship recipients for the master program is Rp. 1,500,000, - and the doctoral program is Rp. 2,500,000.
3. It is difficult to get a student visa for students who come from countries that are experiencing conflict. The Institutional Directorate of the Ministry of Education and Culture has a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for granting study permits and a cover letter for each student receiving the KNB Scholarship to get a student visa. But today, the granting study permits and student visas services for foreign students are relatively easier because they are carried out online. However, the granting of student visas by the Directorate of Traffic and Immigration of the Ministry of Law and Human Rights still prioritizes the precautionary principle.



4. The difficulty of equalizing Indonesian diplomas in the student's country of origin. When viewed from the general prerequisites for equalizing diplomas, such as the Ranking Position of universities in Indonesia; universities and study programs accreditation; Letter of Acceptance; Graduation certificate (even in Indonesia, a Certificate of Companion of Diplomas has been applied) armed with proof of verification of validity from the MOECRT; also study visas and passports, it seems that the MOECRT and 23 implementing partners universities have met these general requirements. To solve this problem, it is necessary to coordinate and work with Education and Culture Attaché in the student's home country to be able to assist as a mediator.

Based on the planning for the KNB Scholarship implementation in 2021, there are several improvements and adjustments such as:

1. Additional quota of 215 students;
2. Offering scholarship schemes for doctoral programs, both doctoral programs by research and by courses;
3. Offering international class programs (in English);
4. Adjustment of the unit costs of the Scholarship component (living allowances, tuition fees, research publication allowance, also health insurance); and
5. Improved coordination and cooperation between the MOECRT, Indonesian State Intelligence Agency (BIN), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Law and Human Rights as a clearing house for prospective KNB Scholarship recipients from countries that experiencing conflict.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Providing scholarships to foreign students to study in Indonesia is a form of soft power to improve nation branding. The KNB Scholarship is a form of cultural diplomacy that supports policy directions in the 2020-2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan. In addition to contributing to human resources development in developing countries, the KNB Scholarship also aims to increase cultural understanding and strengthen relations and cooperation between developing countries.

The KNB scholarship implementation, the synergy between the government and universities is needed to provide the best facilities and education for students who receive the scholarship. this program existence also provides opportunities for students from developing countries to experience living and studying in Indonesia as one of the most diverse countries.

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