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The excellence scholarships program: Analysis of implementation aspects and societal impact Achmad Kosasih, Nurzela Eka Juniarfa, Yusuf Fadli, Adie Dwiyanto Nurlukman, Abdul Basit

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Sierhiei Sakhanienko, Natalia Kolisnichenko, Oleg Dolzhenkovz

The implementation of *Sewakadharma* work culture to improve public service quality in Denpasar City, Indonesia **Ni Putu Tirka Widanti**

Mainstreaming state auxiliary agency to handling revenge porn victims in Indonesia, 2020-2021 Pamela Setya Miliasari, Dede Sri Kartini, Nandang Alamsah Delianoor

Public service transformation trough digital-based services during Covid-19 pandemic in Riau Province, Indonesia

Panca Setyo Prihatin, Pahmi Amri, Agung Wicaksono

Islamophobia as a religious-based horizontal conflict and its resolution Rodon Pedrason, Waluyo Handoko, Paulus Israwan Setyoko, Denok Kurniasih

NO. 1

Social capital as a political strategy: evidence from Nasdem Party in Makassar City, Indonesia Suhardiman Syamsu, Andi Muhammad Rusli, Miranda Malinda Hamka

Local development and enviromental governance: Experienced from extractive industry in East Luwu, Indonesia

Umar Congge, Srirath Gohwong

JIP

Policy model for development of tourism villages based on local wisdom towards self-reliant village in Pangandaran Regency, Indonesia

Yaya Mulyana, Abu Huraerah, M. Budiana, Regan Vaughan

VOL. XIII





Department of Government Studies Faculty of Social and Political Sciences Universitas Muhammadiyah Makassar



PP. 01-181

P-ISSN 2088-3706

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VOL. XIII NO. ²

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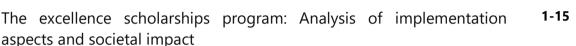
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⁵ Department of Communication Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang, Indonesia

How to deal with children's violence? Implementation of child **16-29** protection policies in Bekasi Regency, Indonesia Aos Kuswandi¹, Ainur Rofieq², Siti Nuraini³, Noer Kholis⁴

^{1, 3, 4} Department of Government Science, Graduate School, Universitas Islam 45, Indonesia

² Department of Government Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Islam 45, Indonesia

Unfolding women's role in small-scale fishing community in The **30-43** Philippines toward formulating a gender-sensitive local government policy

Joy Tricia Mae Corpuz¹, Reynald Cacho², Brenda Villamor³, Maria Gracia Samson⁴, Ma. Sheila Simat⁵

¹²³⁴⁵ Philippine Normal University - South Luzon, Philippines

Regional head elections, high-cost politics, and corruption in Indonesia **44-59** Leo Agustino¹, M Dian Hikmawan², Jonah Silas³

- ¹ Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Social and Political Science Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Indonesia
- ² Department of Government Science, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Sultan Ageng Tirtayasa, Indonesia
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Territorial reform of areas with concentrated residence of minorities **60-79** within decentralization policy under polyethnicity in Ukraine Sierhiei Sakhanienko¹, Natalia Kolisnichenko^{2*)}, Oleg Dolzhenkov³

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The implementation of *Sewakadharma* work culture to improve public **80-91** service quality in Denpasar City, Indonesia

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Mainstreaming state auxiliary agency to handling revenge porn victims **92-110** in Indonesia, 2020-2021

Pamela Setya Miliasari¹, Dede Sri Kartini², Nandang Alamsah Delianoor³

¹²³ Department of Government Studies, Postgraduate Program, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Padjajaran, Indonesia

Public service transformation trough digital-based services during **111-124** Covid-19 pandemic in Riau Province, Indonesia

Panca Setyo Prihatin¹, Pahmi Amri², Agung Wicaksono³

^{1,2} Department of Government Studies, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Islam Riau, Indonesia

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Islamophobia as a religious-based horizontal conflict and its resolution **125-140** Rodon Pedrason^{1*)}, Waluyo Handoko², Paulus Israwan Setyoko³, Denok Kurniasih⁴

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Social capital as a political strategy: evidence from Nasdem Party in 141-155 Makassar City, Indonesia

Suhardiman Syamsu¹, Andi Muhammad Rusli², Miranda Malinda Hamka³

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Local development and enviromental governance: Experienced from **156-168** extractive industry in East Luwu, Indonesia

Umar Congge¹, Srirath Gohwong²

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Policy model for development of tourism villages based on local **169-181** wisdom towards self-reliant village in Pangandaran Regency, Indonesia **Yaya Mulyana**¹, **Abu Huraerah**², **M. Budiana**³, **Regan Vaughan**⁴

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The excellence scholarships program: Analysis of implementation aspects and societal impact

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Abstract

Education creates reliable and competitive people resources, which determines a nation's success. Scholarship policies have a substantial impact on the growth of a nation, particularly in terms of enhancing the quality of human resources and access to quality education. Open access to education can help establish an improved education system. The Excellence Scholarships Program is part of the Indonesian government's goal to produce trustworthy and competitive human resources. This research used a qualitative descriptive methodology by tracing official government documents associated with the Excellence Scholarships program. This report analyzes the 2019-2020 implementation and impact of Indonesia's main scholarship program. This study examined program implementation using descriptivequalitative research. According to the findings of this study, 2025 undergraduates won scholarships in the last two years. The procedures and aid distribution of the Excellence scholarship program are effective because they adhere to the predetermined flow and conditions, however, future improvements are required for the implementation of these scholarship programs: first, improving the principle of equal distribution of scholarship recipients to combat inequality, particularly in eastern Indonesia; and second, providing equal opportunities. This research also suggests further research could look into how the excellence scholarships program enhances scholarship recipients' quality of life and human resources.

Keywords: education; human resources competitiveness; scholarships

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Introduction

Scholarship policies have a significant influence on the development of a nation, especially in improving the quality of human resources and access to quality education (Ilechukwu, 2014; Sari, 2023). Various studies have shown how scholarship programs contribute socially and economically (Gufron, Simanjuntak, & Novianti, 2022; Hilal, Scott, & Maadad, 2015) or can even become a potential model for building the leadership capacity of the nation's young generation (Franzen, 2020). For this reason, capacity building and quality of human resources, which in this research is pursued through a scholarship policy, can be the prime capital for national development.

Human resource development is one of the essential tasks in facing high-speed growth in the 21st century (Hassan, Rymbai, & Bhat, 2019), not least for Indonesia, which is trying to transform itself into a developed country (Darman, 2017). One of the visions of Indonesia 2045 is the development of quality human resources who master science and technology, rolled out by the President of the Republic of Indonesia. These quality human resources are national development assets and state investment in welcoming the nation's future (Mayrhofer, Gooderham, & Brewster, 2019; Muhyiddin, 2019; Piwowar-Sulej, 2021). Therefore, superior and competitive human resources are necessary to win the competition in the global arena (Ruhana, 2012).

Law No. 12 of 2012 concerning the Higher Education System states that the most crucial part in building superior human resources in their fields and being able to compete globally is through education. The better the quality of education, the better the nation's quality (Sulisworo, 2016). Therefore, human resources development in the long term must be based on quality education so that the resulting human resources can play a role in the country's development (Hapsari, Harini, & Nugroho, 2018; Laurie, Nonoyama-Tarumi, Mckeown, & Hopkins, 2016).

The importance of education as an aspect that determines a nation's future leads to the need for the community to obtain the broadest possible access to formal education (Andriadi, Asih, Dewi, Nugraha, & Samadhinata, 2019). This access can be pursued in various ways: by seeking educational funding assistance (scholarships). Moreover, scholarships are also an external factor in education because they relate to socio-economic aspects (Abima Adi & Arief, 2016; Özoğlu, Gür, & Coşkun, 2015). Jayen, 2018) states that scholarships are one of the factors that dominate the influence of student achievement (Egalite, Stallings, & Porter, 2020; Hapsari et al., 2018).

Through the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Indonesian government has several scholarship programs to help people have equal opportunities in accessing education. One of the scholarship programs launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia is The Excellence Scholarships Program, confirmed in the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2009.

Based on Utomo (2011), scholarships are defined as providing financial assistance from donors (or the government) to individuals for their education continuation. Scholarships can be given either by the government, companies, or foundations (Putra & Hardiyanti, 2011). Scholarships are given to individuals to continue their education at a higher level. Government assistance for education can take the form of cash payments to businesses or communities to improve the community's welfare through higher education (Handoko & Patriadi, 2005).

Essentially, the scholarship program aimed at building and developing superior Indonesian human resources so that, in turn, they can fully support the acceleration of national development (Towns et al., 2014). In the context of this research, the scholarship program as educational support for the people has relevance when it is associated with the Indonesian Human Development Index.

The Human Development Index (HDI) in Indonesia still shows gaps (Figure 1). The HDI in eastern Indonesia is still lagging compared to the HDI in western Indonesia, especially on the island of Java. In some areas in Eastern Indonesia, such as Sulawesi, Maluku, and Papua, the figure for HDI is still relatively low compared to other regions (BPS, 2021). To overcome this gap, the government must develop a unique strategy so that human resource development can be carried out evenly. If the HDI can rise, regional development can catalyze national progress.

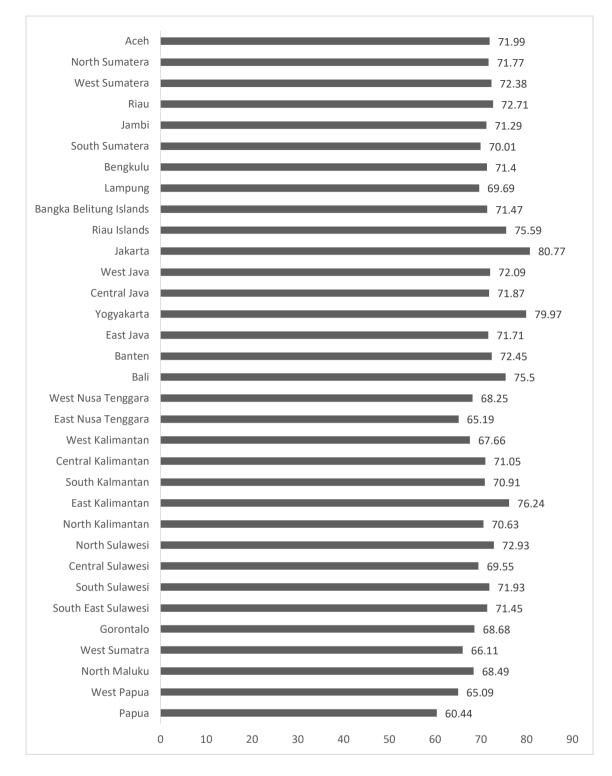


Figure 1. Human Development Index in Indonesia Based on Provinces in 2020 Source: (BPS, 2021)

The Human Development Index (HDI) has three leading indicators: health, education, and economics (BPS, 2021). This study tries to highlight the levels of education used as a basis for increasing HDI in several regions in Indonesia. One way to increase the HDI is to increase access to education (Patel & Annapoorna, 2019; Yin, Lepinteur, Clark, & D'Ambrosio, 2023). The government may organize educational assistance programs or scholarships as one option, following the Constitution of 1945,

which requires the government to allocate 20 percent of the state budget to education sector development.

Since the reform era, the Indonesian government has launched scholarship programs such as Excellence Scholarships Program, Smart Indonesia Card-College (*Kartu Indonesia Pintar*), The Indonesia Endowment Funds for Education, the Outstanding Santri Scholarship program, the Indonesian Lecturer Excellence Scholarship, and Domestic Postgraduate Education Scholarships. The scholarship program can be said to have gained traction during the presidency of Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. In contrast, Jokowi has established several scholarship programs for the nation's brightest students to attend prestigious universities. Hopefully, the scholarship recipients' learning outcomes will help to further the development of Indonesia in the future.

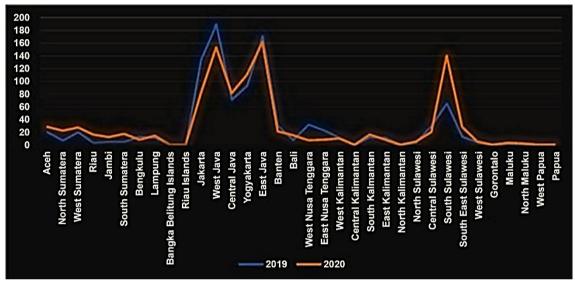


Figure 2. Data on Provincial-based Excellence Scholarship Recipients in 2019-2020 Source: Processed by Researchers from the Ministry of Education and Culture (2020)

When we look at the scholarship data for 2019-2020 (Figure 2), in that case, recipients of scholarship assistance from Java Island, such as Special Capital Region of Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, East Java, and Special Region of Yogyakarta, predominate, and Eastern Indonesia is still very underdeveloped. Despite an increase in 2020, South Sulawesi universities' recipients still dominate Eastern Indonesia regions.

Inequality in the implementation of scholarships can impact uneven development in various aspects. First, if scholarships are only given to a small portion of the population, others do not have the same opportunity to get a better education (Haas & Van De Werfhorst, 2017). This inequality can strengthen inequality in access to opportunities and resources that can advance a person and his community.

Second, scholarship programs that are not well planned and distributed evenly can cause inequality in the distribution of resources (Cosentino, Fortson, Liuzzi, Harris, & Blair, 2019; Nimer, 2020). If an area or population does not receive sufficient scholarship allocations, this will reinforce inequality in accessing higher education and the resources needed to advance local communities (King, Forsey, & Pegrum, 2021).

Third, inequality in the provision of scholarships can also impact the quality of human resources in a country (Perna, Orosz, & Jumakulov, 2015). In this case, if only a few people have access to scholarships and opportunities to access higher education, then the country may not have adequate quality human resources to advance its

national development, which can aggravate the gap in human resources between regions.

Targeted planning and implementation are needed to address the imbalance in the execution of the scholarship program. The goal is that every individual has the same opportunity to access scholarships. To realize good planning and implementation, the government and educational institutions must conduct regular evaluations to ensure that scholarship allocations are fair and effective. In addition, it needs support from various parties to increase access to education for people who do not have the same opportunities, for example, through education financing programs, training and skills development, and more open access policies.

Based on the description described above, this study wants to describe the distribution of the Excellence Scholarships program launched by the government through the Ministry of Education and Culture and to explain how effective the implementation stage is. The effectiveness of the Excellence Scholarships program will be explained based on the phase of implementation and the impact felt by the recipients, particularly students pursuing an undergraduate degrees at Indonesian universities. When linking this program to the equal distribution of Indonesia's human resource development, the issue of effectiveness becomes critical.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach by tracing official government documents related to the Excellence Scholarships program. The descriptive method is used when researching a group of people, objects, situations, thoughts, or events that align with the research topic (Setiawati, 2016). Research informants are parties who can provide accurate and dependable data about existing situations and conditions (Andriadi et al., 2019). The data consists of statements or objects that aid researchers in comprehending the research problem.

Data collection techniques were carried out through interviews with relevant informants and related to research, including the implementing staff of the Excellence Scholarships program at the center of educational financing institutions, with several recipients of scholarships. The criteria for scholarship recipient informants are outstanding individuals pursuing an undergraduate degree. Interviews were conducted in person and online through the Zoom Meeting application. Due to limitations during the Covid-19 Pandemic, online interviews were conducted via email or direct messages via Whatsapp to resource persons (recipients of scholarships).

Other sources of data used are books, journals, official government documents related to educational scholarships, official data from the Ministry of Education and Culture regarding awardees of scholarships, and digital data originating from big data (websites, social media, and online media). The data obtained is then reduced, analyzed with the theoretical framework used, and then interpreted based on the findings in the field.

Results and Discussion

Excellence Scholarships Program: an Overview

The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education formerly The Ministry of Higher Education and Culture has several educational assistance programs (scholarships), one of which is *Beasiswa Unggulan*. This program aims to improve the capabilities and competencies of the human resources of Indonesian people so that they can support the acceleration of national development (Davis, 2012; Jabarkhail & Dooley, 2019).

The implementation of the scholarship program also can be a soft power strategy for the Indonesian government's diplomacy because it allows international students from friendly countries or countries with diplomatic relations with Indonesia to pursue or continue their higher education at various universities in Indonesia (Ayhan, Gouda, & Lee, 2022; Brilyanti, 2021; Hawignyo, 2015).

The Excellence Scholarships program launched by the The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education intends to support efforts to improve the quality of Indonesian human resources through educational assistance, both through degree and non-degree pathways. Under the duties and functions of The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, this program is prioritized to support the efforts to improve the quality of education and culture, so the priority in obtaining funding is the fields relevant to educational and cultural development. Through this program, the government also hopes to narrow the gap in society so that people have the opportunity to access education (King, Forsey, & Pegrum, 2021; Waluyo, Eng, & Wiseman, 2019).

The government's Excellence Scholarships program, launched through The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, is divided into four categories: (1) scholarships for outstanding individuals; (2) scholarships for outstanding Ministry of Education and Culture employees; (3) scholarships for persons with disabilities; and (4) scholarships for outstanding international students pursuing higher education (college) in Indonesia. All of the scholarships cover tuition for Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral programs at the colleges chosen by the students.

There are several requirements and also mechanisms that must be met regarding the implementation of this scholarship. To be eligible for the flagship scholarship program must have a certificate demonstrating national or international academic or non-academic achievements, receive recommendations from related institutions, not receive similar scholarships from other sources, and have been accepted by an accredited college with a B or very good grade point average.

The special requirements for participating in the Excellence Scholarships program at the undergraduate level include age requirements, cumulative achievement index, TOEFL scores, and writing essays, as stated by one of the resource persons as an employee of The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education in an interview (11 October 2021). These requirements include maximum age of 22 years for The new students and a maximum of 23 years for students while studying, filling out National Examination and National-Based School Examination scores for domestic graduate students, having a minimum IPK of 3.25 on a scale of 4,00. For students who are taking lectures (ongoing status), have a minimum TOEFL score of 500, and make written essays (1500 words) using Indonesian with the theme I am the Great Generation of the Indonesian Nation's Pride.." (Interview, October 11, 2021).

From the requirements submitted to participate in this scholarship program, it is clear that the students selected as recipients are academically qualified to achieve the primary objective of developing superior and competitive human resources. As one example, the requirement of English mastery is a must in the era of increasingly fierce global competition in the future. In addition, the ability to express ideas in scientific works is also a skill prospective scholarship recipients must master. With the assistance of these two abilities, scholarship recipients can publish their scientific research in reputable international journals. After the various administrative requirements above are met, prospective scholarship recipients are required to enroll in this program. Scholarship applicants can apply by following the following registration mechanisms and procedures [Figure 3].

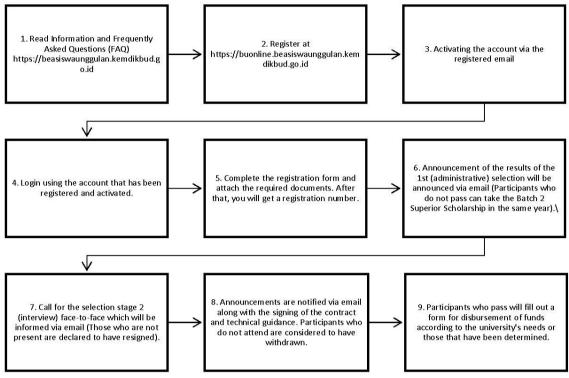


Figure 3. Mechanisms and Procedures for Registration of Excellence Scholarships Program Source: Processed by Researchers from The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education (2020)

The stages designed by The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education for Excellence Scholarships program are presented in a transparent, accountable, and not burdening the scholarship applicants. Based on the policy regarding the requirements and mechanisms above, participants who participated in the flagship scholarship program did not find any obstacles in completing requirements when registering. As conveyed by a resource person who received this scholarship through an interview (20 August 2021), there are no significant barriers to registering for the flagship scholarship program; the system and the committee are both helpful and provide prompt responses if there are any questions.

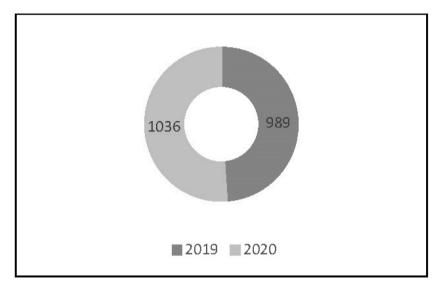
Uncomplicated procedures and requirements and the use of technology in the online registration process contributed to the high enthusiasm of all prospective scholarship recipients (Aldahdouh, Nokelainen, & Korhonen, 2020; Cordes, 2012) During the social distancing policy because of the Covid-19 pandemic, internet technology makes it easier for prospective scholarship recipients (Pratono, 2022; Vahdat, 2022)

The Policy of Excellence Scholarships Program: Budget, Scope, and Target

The education budget provided by the Indonesian government to realize the Excellence Scholarships program for undergraduate studies in 2019 is Rp. 28,325,325.00 and, in 2020, Rp. 28,842,074.00. The budget includes tuition fees/semester, book fees, and living expenses. From these data, it can be seen that there is improving in the scholarship fund. In other words, the government has shown seriousness in building

and developing the quality of human resources through education so that later Indonesian human resources can be competitive in the era of globalization.

The public welcomes the government's seriousness by participating in the scholarship program, reflected in the community's enthusiasm, which has increased yearly since this program was launched. After going through a rigorous process and selection, there were 989 scholarship recipients from various categories in 2019. In 2020, the number of scholarship recipients increased to 1,036 (Figure 4). Easy requirements and broad opportunities for people to register can undoubtedly be a factor behind the increasing enthusiasm of the prospective recipient.





Source: Processed by Researchers from The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education (2020)

The increase in the number of scholarship recipients is inseparable from the success of the program socialization carried out by the government regarding this scholarship program (Adima, 2021). As stated in an interview by a resource person who works for The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education (11 October 2021), the socialization of this program is done online and offline. Online socialization through The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education website, social media, and electronic mass media at the national level. Offline socialization through scholarship exhibitions on a national and international scale, print media such as brochures, banners, recipients, and those who have received this scholarship program.

Program socialization through digital technology and information described above aligns with times. Furthermore, the younger generation, the program's primary target, is a "technology literate" generation, with their daily lives inextricably linked to the internet. Technology can aid the widespread dissemination of information about excellent scholarship programs (Pratono, 2022; Vahdat, 2022). Based on the statement of one informant, the alum network is also a factor that plays a crucial role in disseminating information on this scholarship program.

The impact felt by the families whose child receives the scholarship. Based on a statement by one of the scholarship recipients (Aina), who expressed her happiness and gratitude for her scholarship. Aina can contribute financially to her family's well-being.

Furthermore, the scholarship program provides financial assistance to prospective scholarship recipients (Erwin, Binder, Miller, & Krause, 2021; Miller, 2018). According to a verifiable source, this program could also aid in improving an individual's education. And another source adds that this program could help to improve personal education. It means that in addition to financial benefits, scholarship recipients also boost the quality of their education through the scholarship program (Aliyyah, Rosyidi, & Rugaiyah, 2019; Subbiondo, 2013). Therefore, tuition assistance through scholarships from the government encourages people's enthusiasm to continue their studies to a higher level of education.

The enthusiasm then continues with determining interests or choosing the majors to be taken. The data shows that the recipients of excellent scholarships for undergraduate studies majoring in Informatics Engineering, then majoring in Management and Economics, and in the third position the most choose the Department of Medicine (Figure 5).

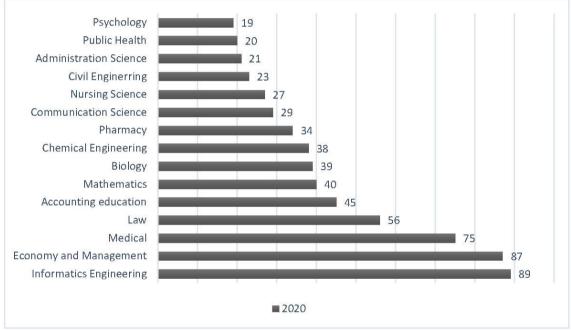


Figure 5. Fifteen Majors Studies Chosen by Scholarship Recipients Source: Processed by Researchers from The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education (2020)

The three majors occupy the top three positions most in demand by scholarship recipients for undergraduate degrees. Informatics engineering is the most popular major. Many things make informatics engineering popular. Some of the reasons are the rapid development of information and technology (IT), the variety of available jobs, the ability to work anywhere, the requirement that the learning process is completed solely on a laptop or personal computer (PC), the excellent job prospects, and the ability to work in all fields (Fajaryati et al., 2015).

The second most chosen position was majoring in Management and Economics. The number of students who want to become young entrepreneurs makes this department much in demand because students can better prepare to become entrepreneurs. In addition, students can learn how to manage companies and human resources (HR), have organizational skills, and have extensive and broad job opportunities.

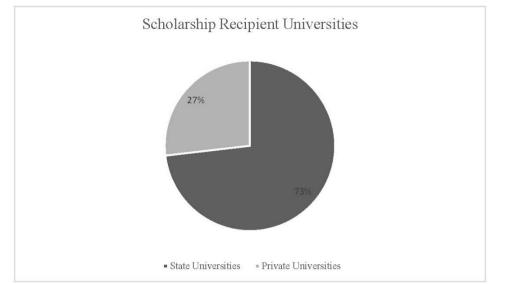


Figure 6. Category of Scholarship Recipient Universities for Undergraduate Study Levels in 2020 Source: Processed by Researchers from The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education (2020)

In the meantime, a more significant proportion of students from state universities than private universities are recipients of this scholarship program. As one of the contributing factors, the societal belief that state universities are the best place to earn a bachelor's degree is still prevalent (Figure 6). Consequently, it is unsurprising that state universities are constantly inundated with thousands of new students. Campus rankings, human resources (HR) availability, accomplishments, employment opportunities, and infrastructure support are additional factors contributing to state universities' dominance (Wahab & Rahayu, 2013).

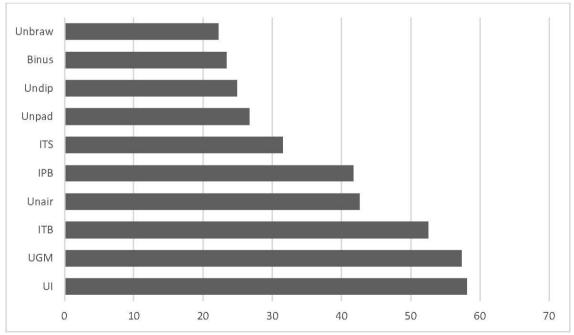


Figure 7. Top Ten Universities 2021 Source: (QS, 2021)

In the QS World University Rankings released in 2021, the top 10 best universities in Indonesia are dominated by state universities (Figure 7) where the top three positions are occupied by Universitas Indonesia, Universitas Gadjah Mada, and Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB).

University	City
Universitas Gadjah Mada	Yogyakarta
Universitas Halu Oleo	Kendari
Universitas Indonesia	Depok
Universitas Airlangga	Surabaya
Universitas Padjajaran	Bandung
Universitas Lambung Mangkurat	Banjarmasin
Universitas Udayana	Bali
Universitas Telkom	Bandung
Universitas Muhammadiyah Jember	Jember
Universitas Trisakti	Jakarta

Table 1. Examples of Top Scholarship Recipient Universities

Source: Processed by Researchers from The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education (2020)

In addition, the ranking of absorption in the world of work in 2022 is also dominated by the state universities (Table 1) such as Universitas Indonesia (UI), Universitas Airlangga, Institut Teknologi Bandung, Universitas Gajah Mada, Universitas Brawijaya (UNDIP, 2021).

Conclusion

Education is a crucial aspect in the Human Development Index. Improving the quality of education, including the ease of accessing quality education, is an absolute necessity in building a nation, one of which can be pursued through the scholarship program.

The provision of educational assistance in the community through an excellence scholarships program for undergraduate studies has run smoothly and effectively, as seen by the increased enthusiasm to participate in this program in 2019 and 2020. The simplicity of the procedure or mechanism for applying online demonstrates its effectiveness. Furthermore, the use of various communication channels as a means of program socialization has used both online and offline media. Through The Indonesian Ministry of Research, Technology and Higher Education, the government has made genuine efforts to develop superior and competitive Indonesian human resources who will later participate in national development through the *Beasiswa Unggulan* program at the regional, national, and international levels.

Future improvements for the implementation of these scholarship programs include: first, improving the principle of equal distribution of scholarship recipients to combat inequality, particularly in the eastern part of Indonesia; and second, providing equal opportunities to students in private universities by adding quotas for Excellence Scholarships recipients, as is the case with state universities.

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