Research and Development Journal Of Education
Vol. 12, No. 2, Oktober 2026, Pp: 892 – 898 p–ISSN 2406-9744
DOI: https://doi.org/10.30998 e–ISSN 2657-1056
Available online at https://journal.lppmunindra.ac.id/index.php/RDJE

THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGE IN BROADENING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC INSIGHTS: A CASE STUDY OF FIELD WORK EXPERIENCES

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Received: 24 November 2025
Revised: 16 Oktober 2026
Accepted: 16 Oktober 2026

Abstract

This study aims to explore the role of institutional linkages in broadening students' academic horizons through Field Work Lectures (KKL) activities between the University of Muhammadiyah Ponorogo (UMPO) and the University of PGRI Semarang (UPGRIS). The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were obtained from observations, documentation, and student reflections, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The results showed that KKL facilitated institutional collaboration by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and broadened students' academic horizons through public lectures on digital literacy. The expansion of students' insights was seen in three main dimensions: institutional understanding, mastery of digital literacy as a 21st-century competency, and reflective skills that support critical and adaptive thinking. Student involvement is still limited to observation and documentation, but this activity opens up opportunities for long-term collaboration, including research collaborations, joint publications, academic mobility, and curriculum development. These findings confirm that institutional linkages through KKL can serve as a strategic model for promoting holistic student development while strengthening university networks.

Keywords: Institutional Linkage; Fieldwork; Academic Insight; Higher Education

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How to Cite: Faradila, A., Ardyanti, Y., Restuningtyas, N., Arisanti, F., Rahmawati, A., Mulyani, N., Kuliana, I. I., & Saputro, A. D. (2026). THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL LINKAGE IN BROADENING STUDENTS' ACADEMIC INSIGHTS: A CASE STUDY OF FIELD WORK EXPERIENCES. *Research and Development Journal of Education*, 12(2), 892-898.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a crucial role in shaping students' intellectual competence, professional skills, and social awareness. In the context of globalization, institutional linkages, or connections between universities, are becoming increasingly crucial because they provide students with broader, cross-cultural, and cross-institutional learning experiences (Kassem et al., 2022). According to Tindaon (2015), institutional linkages are an instrument of internationalization in higher education that not only supports student mobility but also improves academic quality through knowledge exchange and research collaboration (Abrar, 2025). Thus, institutional linkages can be viewed as a crucial strategy for broadening students' academic horizons while enhancing higher education competitiveness.

One form of institutional linkage implementation in Indonesia is the Field Work Lecture (KKL). KKL is a contextual learning method oriented toward experiential learning, as proposed by (Khoiriyah et al., 2025), in which students learn through direct experience, reflection, and interaction with real environments (Hariyanto et al., 2022; Yudha, 2025). Study by Solekhan et al. (2024) confirms that fieldwork internships not only enhance students' understanding of course material but also hone their communication, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. When fieldwork is implemented through inter-university collaboration, its added value is even greater due to the transfer of academic perspectives, institutional culture, and professional networks between students and lecturers.

However, collaboration between universities in Indonesia still faces obstacles. Most collaborations remain at the formal level, such as signing a memorandum of understanding, without being followed up with ongoing academic programs (Qorib, 2024). However, a study by Rahayu et al. (2024) shows that applied collaboration, for example, through joint academic activities, is more effective in improving student competency than administrative collaboration. Therefore, institutional linkages embodied in fieldwork have strategic potential to fill this gap by providing students with real-world experiences.

In the context of the globalization of higher education, institutional linkages are a strategic necessity for expanding access to knowledge, strengthening research collaboration, and enhancing universities' competitiveness. However, in Indonesia, interuniversity collaboration often stops at the formal level without ongoing academic follow-up. This situation creates a gap between institutional collaboration policies and their implementation in real-life learning. Therefore, research on the implementation of institutional linkages through Field Work Lectures (KKL) is important because it provides an empirical picture of how interuniversity collaboration can be integrated into student learning. The results of this study are expected to strengthen understanding of KKL's role as an experiential learning vehicle that can broaden academic horizons, shape 21st-century competencies, and support the development of sustainable academic networks between universities.

Based on this background, this research focuses on answering the question: "What is the role of institutional linkages in the UMPO-UPGRIS KKL in expanding students' academic horizons?".

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, focusing on students' Field Work Lecture (KKL) activities at the Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo (UMPO) at the Universitas PGRI Semarang (UPGRIS). Data sources consist of primary data in the form of activity observations, KKL report documentation, and student reflections; and secondary data in the form of related literature and documentation during the activities. Data collection techniques included observation, documentation, and document analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive model of Miles et al. (1994), which includes data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was maintained through triangulation of sources and methods, by comparing data from observations, student reflections, activity reports, and official documents, and combining various data collection techniques to ensure the validity of the research findings.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Results

Activity Description

The Field Work Study (KKL) program for students from the Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo (UMPO) at the PGRI Semarang University (UPGRIS) consisted of two main events: the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and a public lecture on digital literacy. The MoU signing symbolized and marked the beginning of a formal collaboration between the universities, encompassing academics, research, publications, and student exchanges. The KKL students were actively involved as observers and documenters of the event, from the opening ceremony and remarks by university leaders to the signing ceremony. This activity demonstrated how institutional linkages are formally established through a sequence of events that confer both legal legitimacy and strategic significance on both institutions.



Figure 1.
Activity Documentation
Source: Research Team

Furthermore, the public lecture, themed "Teacher Digital Literacy and Learning Quality," provided new insights into the importance of mastering digital technology in education. Through this combination of formal and academic activities, the KKL not only provided field experience but also emphasized the true significance of institutional linkages in strengthening university networks.

Expanded Academic Insights

This Field Work Experience (KKL) expanded students' academic insights across three main dimensions.

1. First, students gained an empirical understanding of how institutional collaboration is designed and implemented, from administrative aspects to academic implications. They learned that institutional linkages are a strategic instrument for universities to expand access to resources, improve the quality of the Tridharma (Three Pillars of Excellence), and strengthen their competitive position in the era of globalization.
2. Second, students' insights were expanded through general lecture material on digital literacy. This theme emphasized that digital competence is a mandatory skill for teachers and prospective educators to ensure learning remains relevant to current needs.

3. Third, students acquired reflective skills, namely the ability to analyze field experiences, document activities meticulously, and construct collective understanding through group discussions. This enriched students' soft skills in critical, adaptive, and collaborative thinking, all of which are part of academic development.

Constraints and Opportunities

Despite providing significant benefits, the KKL activity also presented several constraints. First, students' roles in academic networks remained limited to observation and documentation, so their active involvement in cross-campus academic dialogue was not optimal. Second, the concrete implementation of the MoU has not yet been directly visible, as activities are still at the formal ceremony and public lecture stage. However, observations indicate significant opportunities for further action. The UMPO–UPGRIS collaboration opens opportunities for cross-disciplinary research, joint publications by lecturers and students, faculty exchanges, and student mobility programs. The digital literacy theme is also relevant to global education trends, thus providing a gateway for the development of a technology-based collaborative curriculum. Therefore, the institutional linkages established through this KKL have the potential to sustainably enhance students' academic capacity while strengthening the institutional reputations of both universities.

Discussion

The UMPO-UPGRIS Field Work Experience program demonstrated how institutional linkages were formally established through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and academic activities such as public lectures. These findings align with Guo et al. (2022) perspective, which emphasizes that interuniversity collaboration serves as a strategic instrument in the internationalization of higher education, not merely a formal symbol but also a means of strengthening academic networks (Hasanah & Sassi, 2024). In this context, the formal ceremonial procession held at UPGRIS was not merely ceremonial but also legally legitimate, marking the initial step in a long-term academic collaboration. Oliveira & Proença (2025) noted that most intercampus collaborations remain formal without sustained academic implementation. Therefore, the institutional linkages realized through Field Work Experience constitute an applicable practice for filling this gap.

Furthermore, student involvement in observing and documenting the event demonstrates their role as active stakeholders in the institutional linkage process. These findings are consistent with Kennedy & Pek (2023), research, which found that student participation in cross-institutional activities provides non-formal learning experiences that support the achievement of learning outcomes. However, these findings also differ from those of Sun & Holt (2022) which emphasized the importance of student engagement in academic discourse, not just documentation, for a more meaningful knowledge-sharing process. Research by Soetopo et al. (2023) shows that collaborative activities such as joint fieldwork (KKL) are more effective in developing student competencies than administrative collaboration. This also supports the idea of Marschlich & Ingenhoff (2022) that cross-institutional academic collaboration can improve learning quality and encourage curriculum innovation aligned with global needs.

The results of the activities indicate that students broadened their academic horizons across three dimensions: institutional understanding, digital literacy, and reflective skills. First, the experience of understanding the process of institutional collaboration reinforces Ratna & Gemintang (2022) view that students need exposure to higher education governance practices to gain a global perspective on university functions. Second, the

public lecture on digital literacy emphasized the importance of digital competency in education. This aligns with the findings of Anggraeni et al. (2025), who stated that digital literacy is a 21st-century skill that teachers and prospective educators must possess to integrate technology into learning. Third, the reflective skills students develop through fieldwork activities align with the findings of Regina et al. (2025) , who found that reflection on field experiences encourages the development of critical thinking and adaptive skills. Thus, the expansion of students' academic insight gained through fieldwork can be viewed as a form of holistic learning that combines knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Field data indicate that fieldwork activities yield benefits, including continued access to significant opportunities, particularly in research collaborations, joint publications, and lecturer-student exchanges. This supports the view of Imamah & Aimah (2025) that the sustainability of program implementation determines the success of institutional linkages, not just the opening ceremony. Furthermore, the digital literacy theme raised in the public lecture has strategic relevance. According to research by Susandi et al. (2025), digital literacy is a key competency in 21st-century skills, thus serving as a foundation for the development of a technology-based collaborative curriculum. This means that the obstacles encountered in KKL activities can be turned into opportunities to strengthen long-term academic networks, provided that the MoU is implemented through concrete programs that improve the quality of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that institutional linkage through the Field Work Lecture (KKL) program at the Muhammadiyah University of Ponorogo (UMPO) at the University of PGRI Semarang (UPGRIS) plays a strategic role in broadening students' academic horizons. This program not only formalizes cooperation through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) but also enriches students' perspectives through academic activities, including public lectures on digital literacy. Students' academic insight develops along three main dimensions: understanding institutional cooperation, strengthening digital competencies, and developing reflective skills that support critical and adaptive thinking. Although student involvement is still limited to observation and documentation, this activity offers significant opportunities for long-term collaborations, including research projects, joint publications, lecturer-student exchanges, and technology-based curriculum development. Thus, institutional linkage in the form of KKL has the potential to become a transformative learning model that integrates academic enrichment, professional skills development, and strengthening institutional reputation in the global era.

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