Beyond Hegemony: How KNB Scholarship Program Redefines

Indonesia's Soft Power and Global South Knowledge Production

Christopher Paller Gerale

English Department,
Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia
christophergerale@gmail.com

The Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship Program, launched by the government of the Republic of Indonesia, represents a transformative approach to educational exchange that challenges traditional North-South paradigms. This study adopts several frameworks to comprehensively analyze how the KNB Scholarship Program fosters South-South Cooperation (SSC), disrupts Western-centric knowledge hierarchies, and contributes to capacity building in the Global South. Through a qualitative methodology, the research involves a comprehensive document review of official reports, policy papers, tracer studies, and university evaluations related to the scholarship program, as well as written and oral interviews from the current scholars and alumni and articles, theses, dissertations produced by KNB scholarship recipients. The findings highlight the KNB Scholarship's role in redefining Indonesia's soft power and reshaping Global South knowledge production. It serves not only as a means of individual empowerment but also as a catalyst for systemic change, which drives a transformation in the global educational and diplomatic landscape. In line with the Bandung Conference's spirit of solidarity and self-determination, the KNB Scholarship Program advances Indonesia's role in shaping a more inclusive and equitable global governance framework, offering valuable insights into the future of educational diplomacy and global power dynamics. By prioritizing Global South solidarity, equitable and sustainable development, and the decolonization of knowledge, the KNB Scholarship Program powerfully advances Indonesia's soft power and governance leadership in SSC and directly challenges the dominance of Western academic and political paradigms in a comprehensive approach that can be called "KNB Diplomacy."

Keywords: *Global South Knowledge Production; Indonesian Soft Power; Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship Program; South-South Cooperation (SSC); Western-centric Knowledge Hierarchies*

Introduction

Indonesia's Soft Power and Educational Diplomacy

The term "soft power," as coined by Nye (2004), describes the ability of a country to influence others through cultural appeal, values, and diplomacy, rather than resorting to hard power tactics – coercion or military might. In the context of global politics, it has become a crucial tool for states seeking to enhance their international standing that emphasizes attraction, persuasion, and the promotion of values, such as democracy, human rights, and education. It is particularly

significant in an increasingly multipolar world, where countries are vying for influence in a landscape that is no longer dominated solely by Western powers. In this context, soft power enables emerging powers to project influence, foster cooperation, and build sustainable relationships across the globe. In turn, Indonesia has historically leveraged its diplomatic principles of solidarity and mutual respect as key pillars of its soft power strategy to shape its international influence. Looking back at history, the Asian-African Conference, otherwise known as the Bandung Conference, held in 1955, is a key historical event in the context of Indonesia's approach to International Relations (IR). Initiated by Indonesia's then Prime Minister, Dr. Ali Sastroamidjojo (Rao, 1955; Wang, 1955), the conference, attended by newly independent countries from Asia and Africa, was a seminal moment for the Global South, thereby emphasizing the Bandung Spirit[1] that continues to influence Indonesia's foreign policy today, especially in its efforts to promote South-South Cooperation (SSC), which, as Adjani (2023) points out, functions as a diplomatic tool aligned with national interests and determines the form of cooperation—bilateral, regional, or multilateral of the Republic of Indonesia.

In today's SSC landscape, practitioners pursue goals like expanding global influence, promoting values, accessing markets and resources, and building anti-hegemonic alliances—often with overlapping motivations. Three key approaches have emerged in the Global South: challenging traditional donor-recipient models, strengthening SSC while engaging selectively with traditional donors, and aligning closely with established donor frameworks (Zavarce Velasquez, 2024). Indonesia largely adopts the second approach—deepening SSC through educational initiatives while maintaining pragmatic cooperation with traditional partners. Indonesia's foreign policy goals include supporting decolonization efforts, advancing global social justice, and nurturing international unity grounded in the principles of *Pancasila*[2]. As Southeast Asia's largest economy, Indonesia plays a pivotal regional role and, guided by *bebas-aktif*[3], the country assert itself in global politics rather than adopt a passive stance, as Wicaksana (2023) explains. Its strategic Indo-Pacific position and rising political-economic clout enable it to champion the Global South. Indonesia actively expands its global influence by integrating various forms of diplomacy into its soft power strategy—inter alia, cultural, sports, trade, religious, digital, environmental, water and maritime, and coffee diplomacy. These approaches foster stronger international ties through cultural draw.

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[1] principles of mutual respect, non-interference, and the promotion of development through solidarity.

[2] Pancasila is the foundational philosophical theory of the Indonesian state, consisting of five principles: belief in one God, just and civilized humanity, the unity of Indonesia, democracy guided by inner wisdom in the unanimity arising out of deliberations among representatives, and social justice for all Indonesian people.

[3] The principle of *bebas-aktif* (independent and active) has been the cornerstone of Indonesia's foreign policy since the early years of independence. See Rizal Sukma, "Indonesia's *Bebas-Aktif* Foreign Policy and the 'Security Agreement' with Australia," Australian Journal of International Affairs 51, no. 2 (1997): 231–241, https://doi.org/10.1080/10357719708445212.

Ruderman (2023) asserts that Indonesia's embodiment of its foundational principles within its national ethos—recognized by influential actors in the international system—along with its growing engagement in regional and global affairs, underlines its ambition to shape global governance (Friends of Europe & The Mission of Indonesia to the EU, 2013; Trotier, 2021; Susilo & Prana, 2023). This aspiration is further supported by its strategic use of public diplomacy, particularly in navigating the dual challenge of integrating democracy and Islam into foreign policy, while promoting equitable development through instruments such as educational diplomacy (Sukma, 2011).

Educational diplomacy, defined as the use of academic exchange programs as diplomatic and foreign policy tools, enhances a nation's influence by fostering relationships, projecting knowledge, cultural capital, and values, and promoting mutual understanding (Lindsay, 1989; Nye, 2004; Lima, 2007; Gilboa, 2008; Peterson, 2014; Amirbek & Ydyrys, 2014; Waithaka, 2016; Vaxevanidou, 2018; Khan et al., 2020; Damus, 2021). In the Global South, educational diplomacy has become a crucial means for developing countries to strengthen their global position and foster solidarity among themselves. One of the most significant manifestations of this trend is the sharp rise in the number of international students pursuing higher education worldwide. Since UNESCO began recording data in 1998, the number of international students has more than tripled, reaching 6.4 million by 2020 (British Council, 2024). This surge has been fueled by the increasing globalization of the economy, expanded financial aid opportunities, and active promotion of international education by both sending and host countries, emerging education as a powerful tool for advancing diplomatic and geopolitical interests. Indonesia's commitment to educational diplomacy has its roots in the post-independence period, particularly after the Bandung Conference. This strategy has evolved alongside its foreign policy, with an emphasis on fostering regional solidarity, promoting development, and challenging global inequalities. Unlike traditional North-South educational exchange programs, which often perpetuate unequal power dynamics, South-South educational diplomacy stresses mutual respect, shared learning, and collaborative growth. Hence, over the years, Indonesia has used education, such as through the DARMASISWA Program and the *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang* (KNB) Scholarship Program, as a platform to enhance its influence.

The Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship Program in Context

The KNB Scholarship Program represents, undeniably, a strategic initiative of Indonesia, aimed at providing financial assistance to students from the Global South, thus allowing pursuit of bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degrees at prestigious Indonesian universities.

Table 1. KNB Scholarship Duration

Program	Duration
Indonesian Language Course (BIPA) Program	Maximum of 12 months (2 semesters)
Doctorate Degree Program	Maximum of 48 months (8 semesters)
Master's DegreeProgram	Maximum of 24 months (4 semesters)
Bachelor's Degree Program	Maximum of 48 months (8 semesters)

Source: (Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Republic of Indonesia [DGHE-RT, MoEC-RT, RI], 2021, p. 8).

Initially, the program, formerly called as Gerakan Non-Blok (GNB) Scholarship Program, was conceived during the 10th Conference of Heads of State of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in September 1992. As a result, it was first introduced in 1993, specifically targeting students from NAM member countries. However, over time, the scholarship's scope has evolved, responding to a growing global demand. Notably, in 2002, the regional exclusivity of the program was lifted, marking a significant shift toward inclusivity. In 2006, the scholarship was thereafter renamed as *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang* (KNB) Scholarship Program, thus broadening its reach to students across Asia, the Pacific, South America, Africa, and Eastern Europe (DGHE-RT, MoEC-RT, RI, 2021).

Targeting the Global South: The Rationale of the Strategic Vision of KNB

Figure 1. KNB Scholarship Awardees by Countries in 2021
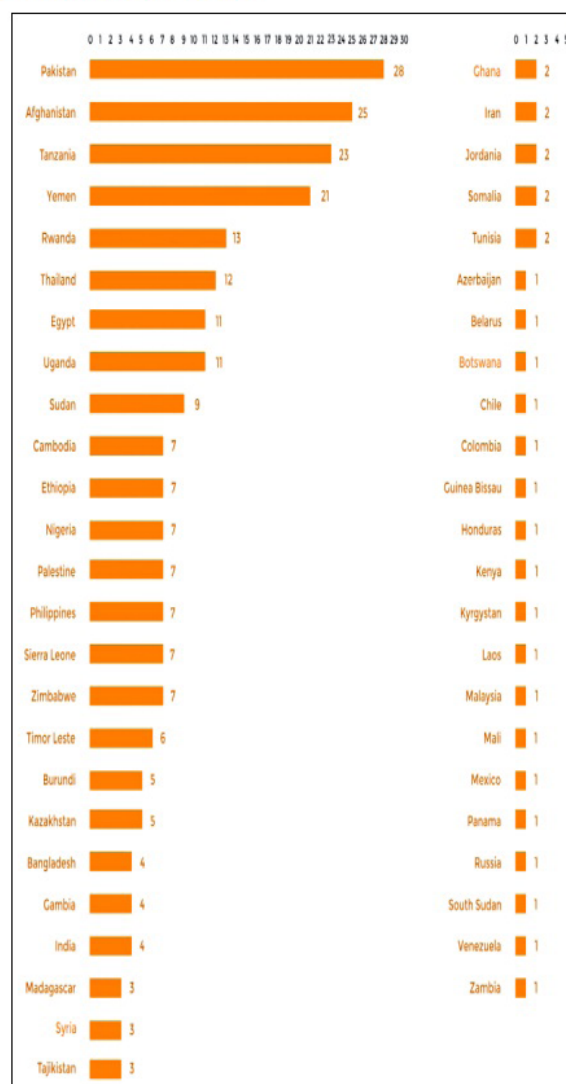
Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p. 3).

The growth of the global student population between 2008 and 2018 underscores regional disparities, particularly in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where rising demand for education is met with structural challenges like inadequate funding and limited institutional capacity.

Table 2. Student Population Evolution in (2008-2018) per World Region

	2008	2018	Change
World	164 921 995	225 070 099	36%
Europe	33 661 519	28 971 740	-14%
Latin America and the Carribean	20 415 867	28 285 435	39%
Northern America	19 694 365	20 565 372	4%
Africa	10 072 854	15 073 427	50%
Oceania	1 857 648	1 978 565	7%
Asia	79 219 742	130 195 560	64%

Source: (Top International Managers in Engineering [T.I.M.E.] Association, 2021, p. 4)

Research from the EdQual program, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and conducted from 2005 to 2011, highlights the need for targeted interventions to improve education in disadvantaged regions. Studies in Rwanda, Tanzania, Ghana, South Africa, and Pakistan found that structural barriers—socioeconomic inequalities, linguistic challenges, and inadequate teacher training—limit learning opportunities in the Global South (Tikly & Barrett, 2013).

Figure 2. Population aged 20-24 by World Region
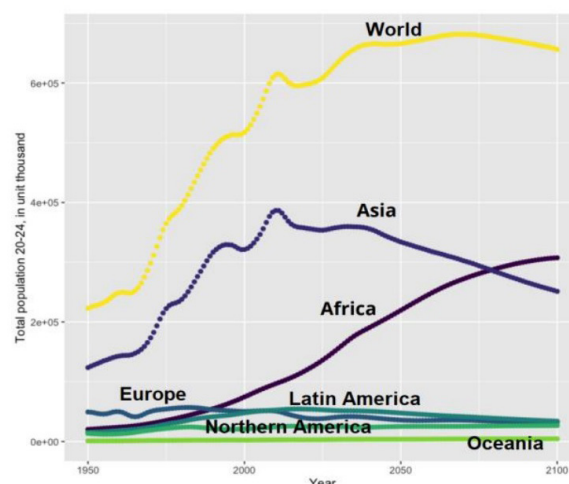
Source: (Top International Managers in Engineering [T.I.M.E.] Association, 2021, p. 2)

While poverty remains a major obstacle, improvements in infrastructure and pedagogy can enhance learning outcomes. Similarly, scholarship programs help bridge educational disparities by providing financial aid and expanding access to quality education for marginalized. Aligned with SDG target 4.b, the KNB Scholarship Program addresses persistent educational disparities in the Global South—where systemic inequalities, limited resources, and inadequate infrastructure hinder access to quality education (UNESCO, 2024)— by prioritizing students from developing countries and expanding their access to quality higher education in Indonesia.

Research Objectives and Scope

While existing literature on educational diplomacy often focuses on North-South exchanges and the associated power imbalances, research on the potential

of SSC to reshape international education and redefine soft power dynamics remains limited (Heryadi et al., 2024). This article addresses that gap by using the KNB Scholarship Program as a case study in educational diplomacy and global equity, building on and expanding the work of Brilyanti (2021). This article examines the KNB Scholarship Program as a case study in the redefinition of Indonesia's soft power and the decolonization of educational exchange. This study investigates how the program functions as a tool of Indonesia's soft power, influencing its foreign policy and strengthening its diplomatic relations with other Global South countries. It also explores how it reshapes global knowledge production by challenging traditional power structures in international education, promoting SSC, empowering scholars from developing countries, and encouraging the exchange of knowledge that challenges Western-centric paradigms. By examining its role in challenging power dynamics, this study contributes to discussions on the future of IR, global governance, and education and the potential for more inclusive models of knowledge production and academic exchange, particularly in the Global South. This article addresses the following research questions:

- *How does the KNB Scholarship Program redefine Indonesia's soft power through educational diplomacy?*

- *How does the KNB Scholarship Program redefine Global South knowledge production?*

The objectives of this study are two-fold:

- To analyze how the KNB Scholarship Program functions as a tool of Indonesia's soft power and its impact on Indonesia's national image and ties with other Global South countries.

- To examine how the KNB Scholarship Program contributes to the decolonization of knowledge production and promotion of SSC in educational exchange, and evaluate its effectiveness in challenging Western-centric paradigms in international education while fostering the academic and professional development of Global South scholars.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study employs constructivism, dependency theory, Global South theory, postcolonial theory, and decolonial theory to examine how scholarship programs initiated by Global South nations reconfigure soft power dynamics and global knowledge production. These programs challenge Western epistemological dominance while fostering horizontal exchanges among developing countries (Wendt, 1992; dos Santos, 1970; Said, 1978; Chen, 2010).

Constructivism and Collaboration

Constructivism emphasizes the socially constructed nature of norms, identities, and institutions in global affairs (Wendt, 1992). When applied to educational diplomacy, this perspective reveals how

Southern-led initiatives cultivate alternative networks of academic exchange that diverge from traditional North-South models. Such programs institutionalize norms of mutual learning and shared development priorities, reflecting Knight's (2014) observation that academic mobility strengthens IR through collaborative engagement. The emphasis on SSC aligns with Stoeckel's (2016) findings on inter-group interactions fostering collective identity, while Zavarce Velasquez (2024) notes how such solidarity challenges Northern hegemony in global governance.

Kant's view of immature cultures, characterized by a lazy and cowardly ethos, offers a deeply troubling lens through which to view the Global South. For him, cultures outside of Europe were not just inferior but culpably immature (Kant, 1784). However, through the lens of constructivism, this perspective must critically be examined— should a certain tribe in Africa, an indigenous person in Mexico, or a Southeast Asian in their own context be viewed as culpably immature merely because they existed outside the Western narrative of progress? The experiences of the Global South, shaped by centuries of colonialism, political upheaval, and socio-cultural transformations, challenge the idea that they are inherently "underdeveloped" or "backward." Indeed, their complexity defies the simplistic categorizations of Western thought (Bello, 2019). Hegel, in his *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte*, presents world history as the self-realization of God, a theodicy of reason and liberty *(Freiheit)*, and a process of Enlightenment *(Aufklärung)* that

unfolds primarily through Europe (Hegel, 1955; Hegel, 1975; Bernal, 1991). From a constructivist perspective, this framework exhibits a socially constructed narrative of progress that positions Europe as the pinnacle of reason and enlightenment, while relegating the Global South to the margins. Hegel's Eurocentric lens fails to recognize the intricate histories of Southeast Asia, which were not "immature" or "underdeveloped," but shaped by unique and sophisticated systems of knowledge, governance, and culture. The Malay Sultanates, the Khmer Empire, and the kingdom of Srivijaya, for instance, were well-established civilizations long before Western colonialism attempted to impose its own standards of "civilization."

Constructivism urges us to question the historical narratives that have been socially constructed to elevate the West while diminishing the value of non-Western experiences. It challenges us to reconsider development not as a linear, Eurocentric march towards a singular, Western-defined notion of progress, but as a complex, multifaceted process shaped by diverse cultures, histories, and epistemologies.

Dependency Theory and Structural Inequality

Dependency Theory locates the Global South's underdevelopment in historical exploitation and asymmetrical global economic structures (dos Santos, 1970; Frank, 1966). This framework rejects Modernization Theory's linear development paradigm (Rostow, 1960; Lerner, 1958; Inkeles & Smith, 1974), demonstrating

how traditional Northern-led scholarship programs reinforce dependency through unidirectional knowledge transfer (Freire, 1970, p. 84; Naidoo, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2013; Chong et al., 2020). Casellato's (2023) study reveals a strong dominance of authors from the Global North—especially the US, Canada, and Europe—who make up the majority of assigned readings. In contrast, Southern-led initiatives disrupt this dynamic by enabling scholars to apply contextually relevant expertise to local challenges, thereby countering intellectual dependency (Prebisch, 1950; Adebisi, 2020; Oztig, 2022). Wallerstein's (1974) World Systems Theory further illuminates how these programs address core-periphery asymmetries in global higher education (Altbach, 2016), particularly in under-resourced regions like South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa (Dormeier Freire, 2023).

Global South Theory and Knowledge Decolonization

Global South theory advocates for the substantive inclusion of Southern perspectives in reshaping global knowledge systems (Suwanbubbha, 2005; Chen, 2010). The imposition of Western-centric models of education, development, and governance has often led to policies that are disconnected from the cultural and socio-economic realities of developing countries, affirming the point of Fanon (1952;2008) in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* that the psychological effects of colonialism and the European worldview indeed shaped colonized identities. Educational programs grounded in this

paradigm operationalize Escobar's (1995) critique of universalist development models by promoting epistemic autonomy (Raz, 1988; Demeter, 2020; Matheson, 2024), the right of societies to produce knowledge reflective of their contextual realities. These initiatives reclaim Foucault's (1980, p. 84) "subjugated knowledges" through integrating indigenous and scientific frameworks, challenging what Mignolo (1995) and Dussel (1995) identified as Western epistemic imperialism. The theoretical works of de Sousa Santos (2014) and Dados and Connell (2012) provide critical foundations for this decolonial approach, while Sen's (1999) capability framework highlights how such programs expand developmental possibilities beyond economic metrics. Regionally, these initiatives foster the educational diplomacy that Buzan et al. (1998) identify as crucial for SSC, particularly in addressing shared challenges like climate change and sustainable development (Khudori, 2006; Lai & Kan, 2020). It is clear that knowledge cannot be simply reduced to power; rather, it is inextricably linked to power dynamics that shape its creation, validation, and dissemination (Foucault, 1980; Alcoff, 1996). It is beyond dispute that traditional epistemologies have often ignored the extent to which power influences not only the application and discovery of knowledge but also its justification and the determination of what is accepted as "truth" (Alcoff, 2007).

Central to this effort is the concept of "decolonization of knowledge" against Eurocentrism (Amin, 1989) and Orientalism (Said, 1978), which, as argued

by postcolonial theorists like Spivak (1988), involves not only a rejection of Western epistemological paradigms but also a reclamation and revitalization of indigenous knowledge systems. In the case of Southeast Asia, knowledge systems and development models need to be understood not through the lens of Western superiority, but in their own terms—terms that recognize local histories, cultural practices, and indigenous knowledge. By reframing the broader Global South, not as spaces of deficiency, but as areas of dynamic cultural production and knowledge, the world can begin to dismantle the colonial and neocolonial structures that continue to define what counts as "progress" or "civilization." In doing so, there will be an opening up of the possibility for more inclusive and equitable models of development that honor the complexity and richness of the Global South, including but not limited to educational exchange and knowledge production.

Postcolonial Theory and Epistemic
Resistance

Colonialism reinforced power dynamics, positioning Western knowledge as the universal norm and sidelining the Global South (Alcoff, 2007; Tesfaye, 2024). This Eurocentric lens erased colonial history and falsely portrayed the Global South as "backward." As Olaniyan (2013) argues, African poverty stems from European exploitation, while de Sousa Santos et al. (2007) assert that colonization imposed Western epistemologies, delegitimizing indigenous knowledge and relegating it to a subordinate role.

Postcolonial theory critiques the enduring coloniality of knowledge production systems (Said, 1978; Spivak, 1988), where Western epistemologies systematically marginalize alternative knowledge traditions (Alatas, 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Chambati, 2013). This marginalization operates through what Kailo (2005, pp. 75-76) terms the "master imaginary"—a hierarchical framework that naturalizes Western epistemic dominance. Southern-led educational initiatives embody de Sousa Santos' (2014) concept of "epistemic solidarity" by centering indigenous perspectives, yet remain constrained by broader structures of epistemic violence (Grosfoguel, 2012). Postcolonial theory advocates for an epistemological shift, urging the Global South to assert its intellectual autonomy and challenge Western knowledge monopolies (Hall & Tandon, 2017). The limitations of current diversity initiatives as "thin inclusion" (Stein, 2017) and "soft reform" (de Oliveira Andreotti et al., 2015) underscore the need for more radical epistemological restructuring beyond mere representation.

Decolonial Theory and Epistemic Justice

Decolonial Theory is a critical framework that seeks to understand and dismantle the ongoing legacies of colonialism in contemporary systems of knowledge, power, culture, and society (Quijano, 2000). Rooted in the experiences and intellectual traditions of the Global South, it challenges the dominance of Western worldviews and aims to re-center marginalized epistemologies, identities, and ways of being.

Historically, the Global South's intellectual contributions have been seen as inferior or derivative, influencing global policies, education, and IR. Education plays a crucial role in this decolonization, as seen in Michel Foucault's concept of epistemic power, which frames knowledge as a tool of control (Foucault, 1980). As Ntsobi (2024) argues, decolonizing education requires significant shifts in both structure and underlying philosophy. Since societies increasingly rely on knowledge as a catalyst for progress (Ndlovu & Woldegiorgis, 2024), shifting knowledge creation from the West to traditionally excluded regions is key to this process.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative research methodology to analyze the KNB Scholarship Program, focusing on its role in redefining Indonesia's soft power vis-à-vis educational diplomacy and reshaping global knowledge production. The research primarily involves a document review and thematic content analysis of sources such as official reports, policy documents, evaluations from Indonesian higher education institutions (HEIs), Indonesian government, especially the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MoECRT), interviews with KNB scholarship recipients, and articles, theses, and dissertations produced by KNB alumni, published in respected scholarly outlets. The document review will assess the program's objectives and alignment with Indonesia's diplomatic strategies, while the content analysis of interviews and

KNB scholars' academic writings will explore themes like decolonization, SSC, and the promotion of indigenous epistemologies and Global South knowledge production. Data will be drawn from primary and secondary sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the program's impact.

Findings and Analysis

The KNB Scholarship serves as a platform where ideas on education, development, and international cooperation are redefined, particularly within the Global South. As Indonesia is not yet a popular destination for students mobility (Abduh et al., 2018; Fajarwati & Suyanto, 2019), it is working on it to increasingly attract international students seeking global academic experiences in Indonesian HEIs (Hamamah & Hapsari, 2021; Yunanto & Tricahyono, 2025). This trend, as Simek and Stewart (2024) emphasize based on the Push-Pull Model proposed by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), aligns with the idea that a nation's strong reputation within the global system plays a crucial role in students' choices of study destinations, as proposed by the World Systems Theory (Wallerstein, 1974) and supported by Sandra (2020). Hapsari and Hamamah (2019) observed that international students adapted quickly to university life in Indonesia, attributing their smooth transition to the institution's well-developed infrastructure, supportive academic environment, and the welcoming nature of faculty and peers. Their satisfaction with their academic journey echoes Indonesia's broader efforts to create an inclusive and

globally competitive educational landscape.

On the other hand, the increasing presence of international students has significantly influenced Indonesian HEIs. The internationalization of these institutions has driven them to enhance their academic offerings, research collaborations, and global engagement (Byun et al., 2011; He & Chiang, 2016). This is integral to Indonesia's foreign policy, aligning with its commitment to regional leadership in Southeast Asia and advocacy for the Global South. As Dr. Rizal Sukma (1995) noted, Indonesia has transitioned from a "low-profile" to an "active foreign policy," based on principles of engagement, mutual respect, and peace. By participating in multilateral forums like the G20 and ASEAN, Indonesia amplifies its global influence and advocates for the inclusion of developing nations in global governance, addressing issues like economic cooperation, political stability, and sustainable development (ASEAN Studies Center, Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2024). This study reveals the KNB Scholarship Program's multifaceted role in redefining Indonesia's soft power, fostering SSC, and contributing to the decolonization of knowledge production in the Global South. The findings, incorporating data from the program's official reports and policy documents and KNB scholars' testimonies, stories, and case studies, are discussed in detail below:
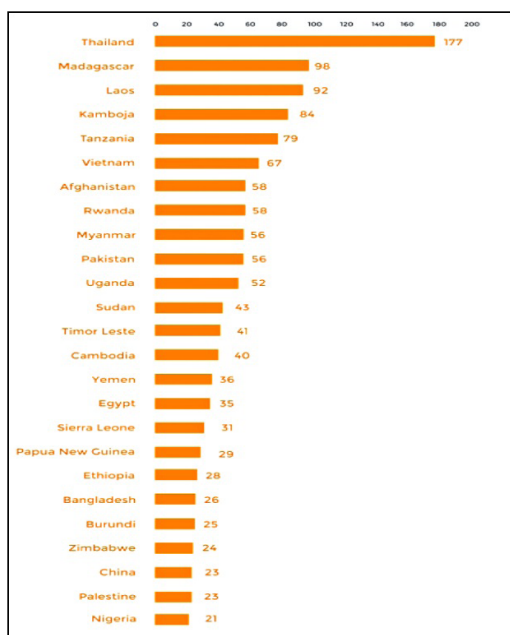
Redefining Indonesia's Soft Power

Figure 3. The KNB Scholarship Program as a Mechanism of Indonesia's Soft Power
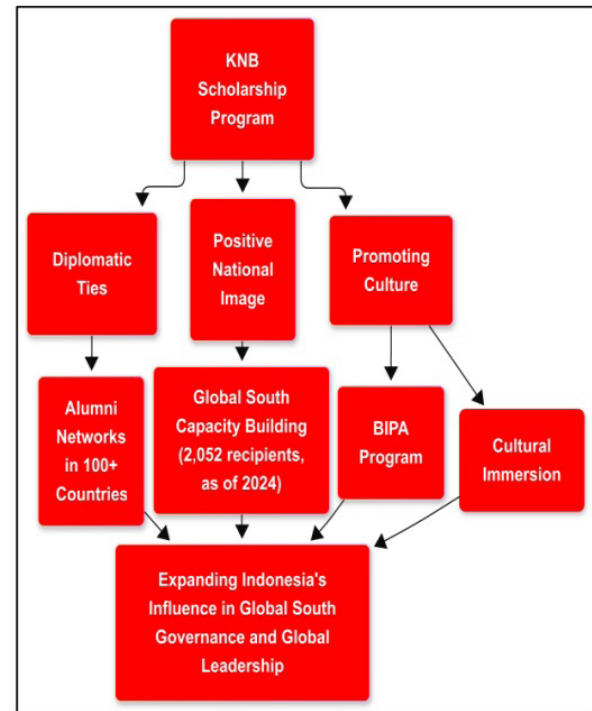
The KNB Scholarship Program enhances Indonesia's soft power in several ways. Firstly, it strengthens diplomatic ties with participating Global South countries.

Figure 4. Distribution of KNB Awardees by Country, by 2021 (Top 25 Countries)

Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p. 7).

Figure 5. Distribution of KNB Awardees by Country, by 2021 (Other Countries)

Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p. 7).

By offering educational opportunities, Indonesia builds goodwill and mutual understanding, translating into increased influence and cooperation. The alumni network created through the KNB program serves as a valuable resource for strengthening bilateral and multilateral relations. As expressed by a KNB alumni named Alith Jacob Majok Ayuen from South Sudan, a Master of Science in Economic Science graduate from Universitas Brawijaya (UB), the KNB program fosters a unique opportunity where *"I can advocate [for] and personally take part in the bilateral and people-to-people relations between Indonesia and South Sudan. Economically, I can see myself open [opening] up investment opportunities for Indonesian [Indonesians] in South Sudan. Last but not [the] least, I will strongly advocate for Indonesian higher education to my fellow South Sudan citizens [South Sudanese citizens] and other international students seeking academic opportunities."* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.48)

Secondly, the program projects a positive image of Indonesia. The data unwrapped that the KNB Scholarship, thus, allows Indonesia to assert itself as a leading voice in the global discourse on education, development, and SSC. It showcases Indonesia's commitment to human capital development and capacity building in the Global South. This enhances Indonesia's image as a responsible and influential global player. The program's emphasis on mutual respect and equitable partnership resonates positively with other developing countries.

Awaludin (2024), citing an interview with Ms. Putri Nailatul Himma, the Head

of the Institutional Strengthening Working Group of the Directorate of Institutional Development of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, notes:

> *This also helps our universities improve cooperation, in other words, to enhance the reputation of Indonesian universities internationally, particularly in the field of education.* **(translated to English from Indonesian by the author)**

Through the program, many Indonesian HEIs have adopted English-medium instruction (EMI) and expanded international-standard offerings, while also integrating programs that celebrate local cultures, values, and knowledge systems. This dual approach enhances Indonesia's image as globally engaged yet culturally rooted. The presence of KNB scholars fosters cross-cultural understanding, positioning Indonesian HEIs as inclusive and globally connected. Importantly, this shift reflects a commitment to autonomous intellectual development, enabling Global South nations like Indonesia to shape educational trajectories aligned with their own histories, cultures, and aspirations.

Thirdly, the scholarship actively promotes Indonesia's language, culture, music, arts, and tourism. Through cultural immersion, educational opportunities, and academic collaboration, the program positions Indonesia as a key player in shaping regional discourse and advancing development initiatives.

Upon arrival, KNB scholars are formally welcomed at the annual KNB International Students Summit (ISS)—a combined orientation and celebration featuring games, competitions, interactive sessions, and cultural performances, which fosters intercultural exchange and peer connection and presents Indonesia as a hospitable, dynamic, and collaborative educational hub.

Figure 6. Filipino KNB Scholars Enjoying Balap Kelereng4 during KNB International Students Summit (ISS) 2022

Note: Photo used with permission.

Accordingly, the KNB program actively promotes Indonesia's rich cultural and artistic heritage, including its language, music, and tourism. Several host universities organize cultural excursions and heritage visits as part of their academic calendar. For instance, Universitas Negeri Malang (UM) conducts annual study tours for KNB scholars, taking them to iconic destinations such as Bali and Banyuwangi.

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4 *Balap kelereng* is a traditional Indonesian marble race where participants balance a marble on a spoon—often held in the mouth—and race to the finish line. It is commonly played during national celebrations and local festivals.

Figure 7. UM KNB Scholars Study Excursion

Note: Photo Courtesy of Office of International Affairs, Universitas Negeri Malang.

Figure 8. KNB Scholars Immersed in Balinese Culture during a Study Excursion in Bali

Note: From Left to Right: KNB scholars from Tanzania, Philippines, Timor-Leste, and Madagascar, photo used with permission.

Another occasion is the excursion study organized by Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU), where five KNB scholars from Bangladesh, Botswana, Pakistan, Tanzania, and Yemen visited SMPN 2 Kabanjahe in North Sumatra in January 2025. Through presentations and discussions with local students, this activity provided a real-world setting to practice their Indonesian language skills and foster intercultural exchange.

Figure 9. USU KNB Scholars Study Excursion

Note: Photo Courtesy of the Directorate of Internationalization and Digital System, Universitas Sumatera Utara (Harahap, 2025).

During these visits, KNB students express deep admiration for Indonesia's natural beauty, cultural richness, and tourist attractions. Many document and share their experiences through social media and personal networks, effectively becoming informal cultural ambassadors. Their positive portrayal of Indonesia online enhances the country's image and contributes to cultural and eco-tourism promotion.

Indonesia also enhances its soft power by embedding its national language into the academic and professional trajectories of

international students. A notable example is the *Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing* (BIPA) program, a mandatory preparatory course for KNB scholars.

This language program introduces them to the Indonesian language and cultural nuances that lay the foundation for deeper academic engagement and social integration (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2020; Wirawan & Nakti, 2023). They engage in ways that go beyond functional communication, which integrates Indonesian language into scholarly discussions. Aguskin and Maryani (2018) found that these students develop a strong Willingness to Communicate (WTC), enabling them to navigate academic and social environments with greater confidence. Based on the data analyzed, it is evident that scholars adopt the Indonesian language in their academic work and professional networks. Correspondingly, the KNB scholarship program extends its influence beyond traditional diplomacy—cultivating long-term affinities and shaping future leaders who carry a lived understanding of Indonesia's values and perspectives.

Table 3. Testimonies of KNB Scholarship Program Recipients Regarding BIPA Program

Names of Recipients and Country of Origin	Degree Program and University	Testimonies
Meaza Haddis Gebeyehu, Ethiopia	Master in Laws in International Trade Law Universitas Indonesia (UI)	*"My journey in Indonesia started with the BIPA (Indonesian Language for Foreign Speakers) program at the Faculty of Humanities, Universitas Indonesia (UI). This program had a significant role in introducing me to Indonesian culture and livelihood." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.23)*
Hend Farouk, Egypt	Master of Arts in Linguistics Studies, University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS)	*"In the first year, I took an Indonesian language course and completed it with satisfactory results." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.31)*
Uchenna Collins Agbarakwe, Nigeria	Master of Science in Management, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan (UNPAR)	*"Studying in Indonesia through the KNB scholarship program has truly impacted my life positively…So coming to Indonesia was a new adventure and phase…The BIPA program made me more determined to succeed in Indonesia. I became more independent and trusted my abilities to learn, I started trying to interact more with the locals. I used to stay at the university dormitory but then moved into a Kos-kosan or lodging house which helped me become more independent and interact more intensively with locals." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.37-38)*
Thipphongphat Manivong, Laos	Master of Education in Sports Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI)	*"Before receiving the KNB scholarship, I received an Art and Culture scholarship from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and stayed in Surabaya for 3 months. Since then, I gained my interest in Indonesian culture, especially Indonesian martial arts: Pencak Silat and Tarung Derajat. After completing my education in 2017, I returned to Laos and worked at Sport Science Centre under the auspices of the Laos Ministry of Defense and is responsible for three sports: Secretary General of Lao National Pencak Silat and Shorinji Kempo, and Deputy Secretary General of Lao National Volleyball Federation… I like many things about Indonesia, particularly the language and cuisine. I also learned a lot from my lecturers and friends in Indonesia on how to maintain good social relations and engage in fun activities, such as hiking, traveling, learning Madura dance, singing Surabaya song Rek Ayo Rek, playing traditional Gamelan and Angklung. I used to perform Indonesian music and dance for Indonesia National Chanel at Yogyakarta University Hall." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.41)*
Alith Jacob Majok Ayuen, South Sudan	Master of Science in Economic Science, Universitas Brawijaya (UB)	*"I experience firsthand Indonesian cuisine, like the delicious Ayam Goreng and Nasi Goreng, which I had never tasted before. I also get to explore the beautiful scenery of Indonesia. In addition, I was surprised to find that Indonesia is not only diverse, but also cosmopolitan. Not only have I met and made friends with Indonesians, who are themselves diverse ethnically and religiously." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.47)*
Khamsone Lorxaypao, Lao PDR	Master of Education in Mathematics Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY)	*"The first course I took during the program was an Indonesian language course. I started learning the Indonesian alphabet, grammar, peer-to-peer conversations with teachers, taking Indonesian listening classes and practicing with my classmates on campus, as well as going on to gather information elsewhere… In addition, I have also learned about the beautiful culture of Indonesia. I studied at the museum on campus and practiced making handicrafts that are unique to Indonesia and have special characteristics of Yogyakarta. Moreover, I also learned and practiced traditional dance." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.56)*

Table 4. Selected Testimonies of KNB Scholars Regarding Studying in Indonesia

Names of Recipients and Country of Origin	Degree Program and University	Testimony
Otaigo Elisha, Tanzania	Master of Science in Natural Resource and Environmental Economics, Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) University	*"I would like to share my experience on how studying in Indonesia, supported by KNB Scholarship, has inspired me to establish NovFeed, a non-for-profit organization concerned with food security and sustainable fish farming, located in Dar Es Salam, Tanzania. I must admit from the outset that my study in Indonesia has significantly contributed to my passion and desire to pursue innovative solutions for community transformation. During my time in Indonesia, I had the opportunity to travel to different provinces to see the contribution of fisheries sector to Indonesia's development. I was interested in how fish farming could contribute to poverty alleviation in poor communities in Indonesia. The lessons I learned from Indonesia had opened up my mind on how fish farming has a great potential to become a key driver for food security and economic development in Tanzania. In 2018, I decided to conduct a survey on Tanzanian fish farmers...that was why I decided to embark on research to find out how Indonesia succeeded in fish farming and why fish feed in Indonesia was more affordable than in Tanzania. It was from my research that my colleagues and I decided to find alternative fish feed. In short, NovFeed was born out of Indonesia. NovFeed is now helping fish farmers to reduce production cost and produce healthier fish for community to consume, and eventually for food-secure Tanzania." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.17-18)*
Muyanja Ssenyonga Z. Jameaba, Uganda	Master of Arts in Public Policy and Administration, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM)	*"I have been experiencing the best of both worlds – being an African studying, living in Indonesia, has helped me evolve personally and professionally. My exposure to African, especially Ugandan, values, norms, customs, and belief system allows me to offer different insights and cases into the way my subjects are taught in Indonesia, and the other way around." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.21-22)*
Shadi Emad. A. Alhaleh, Palestine	Master of Science in Accounting, Universitas Negeri Malang (UM)	*"I got to know so many engaging students and exchanged different topics, not just about studies. KNB Scholarship, through UM, has laid an intellectual foundation into my professional career as an academic who strives for excellence in my field of study. At the same time, it also has shaped my perspective that wisdom and positivity are prime in life." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.27)*
Niyomukiza John Bosco, Uganda	Master of Science in Civil Engineering, Universitas Diponegoro (UnDip)	*"I was able to acquire relevant skills on how to do research and write good scientific papers... These research and writing skills have enabled me to write four scientific articles when I was in Indonesia, one of them was published in the International Soil and Water Conservation Research journal, another one was published by Atlantis Press, and the other two were published in IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science... I came back to Uganda and was appointed a lecturer position in the Department of Civil Engineering of the International University of East Africa." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.33-34)*

Aboyitungiye J. Baptiste, Burundi	Master of Science in Economics, Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS)	*"Having graduated from UNS with the support of KNB Scholarship, I am very confident in both my academic and cultural skills. I can now apply the knowledge that I obtained from Indonesia to develop my community and more widely my country, Burundi. With no delay, after getting my Master diploma approved by the Ministry of Education of Burundi, I got a job as a lecturer at the Burundi National University. With my qualification, I have been asked to teach at several different private universities too. I am very content with the intellectual pathway that I built through KNB Scholarship. I can confidently look into myself and find the 'someone' whom the world can benefit from." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.39-40)*
Thipphongphat Manivong, Laos	Master of Education in Sports Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI)	*"Studying in Indonesia has given me various career opportunities. The knowledge from my study allows me to contribute to sports development in Laos, for example preparing for the Olympics and general training. Luckily, my efforts paid off. Laos got 1 silver and 2 bronze at the 18th Asian Games in Jakarta-Palembang 2018, 2 Bronzes for 18th World Pecak Silat Championship in Singapore 2018, 1 silver, 4 bronzes for the 11th ASEAN School Games at Semarang, Indonesia 2019, 3 silvers, 3 bronzes for the 1st World Beach Pencak Silat Championship at Phuket province, Thailand 2019 and 2 bronzes medal for the 30th SEA Games in Philippine in 2019. I also succeeded in establishing cooperation between the Laos Ministry of Education and the Indonesian Embassy in the field of sports and culture in providing uniforms and funds for the Laos Pencak Silat team. In addition, my proficiency in speaking Indonesian allows me to become a referee, team manager, interpreter and translator. In 2014, I helped a coach from the Timor Leste team to communicate with technical delegate for the 16th ASEAN University Game 2014 in Palembang." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.42)*
Igor Didier Sabukunze, Burundi	Master of Science in Informatics Engineering, Universitas Atma Jaya Yogyakarta (UAJY)	*"During my stay in Indonesia, I learned to understand myself and improve my knowledge by visiting several places to understand Indonesians and what I could learn from them. I was motivated while seeing how young Indonesians are trying to survive by working and creating jobs to leverage their compatriots' welfare in the years to come." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.45)*
Matty Senghore, Gambia	Bachelor of Science in Communication Science, Universitas Negeri Surabaya (UNESA)	*"I have gotten the opportunity to meet different people from different countries, and looked at the world differently. I am able to better understand and tolerate differences. Furthermore, I appreciate the opportunity to learn about a vastly different culture." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.50)*
Nurtilek Kadyrov, Kyrgyztan	Master of Education in English Language Education, Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS)	*"During my bachelor's degree program, I got an opportunity to do my KKN (community service) in one of the villages in Semarang called Mijen where we did a community outreach on sanitation and hygiene. The local people there were kind and hospitable." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.55)*
Khamsone Lorxaypao, Lao PDR	Master of Education in Mathematics Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY)	*"During my study in Indonesia under the KNB Scholarship, I also got the opportunity to learn the Indonesian education system which is different from my country such as a teaching method that allows students to think and innovate more. I believe many of which should be taken as lessons and could be applied in my country. In addition to bringing in technical knowledge, I will take the skill of knowledge gained from the advice of teachers and all my friends to develop myself and advise my department to be aware of the differences in Indonesia and in Laos to learn the best practices on suitability and modernity." (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.57)*

Beyond the classroom, KNB scholars enrolled in bachelor's degree program are offered opportunities to experience *Kuliah Kerja Nyata (*KKN*)[1]*. This hands-on experience not only deepens KNB scholars' understanding of Indonesian society and development practices, but also strengthens their cultural immersion and social responsibility. Through KKN, they are deployed to rural areas to collaborate on local development initiatives. In some documented cases, scholars engaged in a healthcare outreach project, taught local pupils, and supported village officers in developing village-based Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). One KNB scholar recalled his KKN experience in Mijen, Semarang, where he engaged in outreach activities on sanitation and hygiene. Another KNB scholar contributed to improving the black soldier fly farming industry in a village in Yogyakarta, which allows him to apply practical skills in support of community-based innovations. Through community-based activities like these, KNB scholars engage directly with local realities, fostering empathy, mutual learning, and grassroots connection. These elements reinforce the scholarship's role in advancing a decolonial approach that values local knowledge, community participation, and cross-cultural solidarity.

Another is joining summer camps and cultural programs hosted by universities across different islands. These programs allow students to explore regional cultures beyond their host institutions. From learning traditional Javanese dances and Balinese songs to participating in Batik-making workshops and local farming or fishing practices in Sulawesi, these immersive experiences expose scholars to Indonesia's diverse cultural needlework. Many activities also include sustainability themes, helping to foster appreciation not only for Indonesia's traditions but also its commitment to environmental and social values. This emphasis on fostering inclusive and globally engaged education aligns with the transformative impact of intercultural learning environments. Hence, Indonesia has designated the establishment of international programs as a key component of its HEIs internationalization agenda and seeks to bridge the gap with more advanced nations and establish itself as a competitive force within the international community, striving for parity in global academic, economic, and diplomatic arenas (Republic of Indonesia, 2007; Ministry of National Development Planning, 2019). Consequently, both private and public universities actively develop programs designed to appeal to international students (Situmorang et al., 2021). Though there are challenges (Gayatri & Adhini, 2016; Widiasih et al., 2020; Defina & Rizkillah, 2021; Bibi & Hamida, 2024; Saharudin et al., 2024), In line with Irayanti et al. (2025), this study found that international students in Indonesia undergo significant intercultural and ethical development, deepening their appreciation for diverse cultural norms

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[5] *Kuliah Kerja Nyata* (KKN) is a community service program required of Indonesian university students, where they apply academic knowledge to support local development initiatives, often in rural or underserved areas.

through reflective engagement. Their study accentuates the role of structured intercultural education in shaping ethical behavior and fostering empathy, cultural sensitivity, and mutual respect. These findings reinforce the value of initiatives like KNB, which not only facilitate academic mobility but also contribute to Indonesia's broader vision of promoting cross-cultural understanding and ethical global citizenship.

Redefining Global South Knowledge Production

The KNB scholarship program's commitment to facilitating the exchange of knowledge between countries of the Global South serves as an antidote to the Western hegemony over knowledge production. It helps bridge the gap between academic institutions and indigenous knowledge systems, which have been marginalized by Western models.

Figure 10. Marginalization and Resistance in Global South–North Knowledge Relations
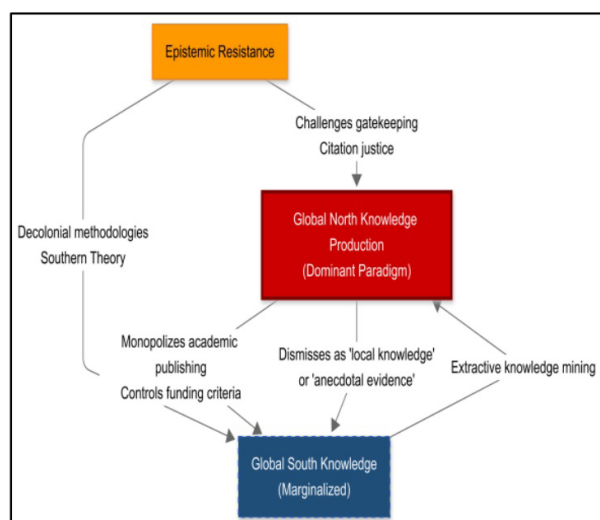
To illustrate this shift, the following sections will detail four essential elements, derived from data analysis, through which it contributes to a more balanced global knowledge production.

Firstly, the program challenges Western-centric paradigms. The global academic system is rooted in Western-centric epistemologies, marginalizing non-Western perspectives and limiting diverse intellectual exploration. The KNB Scholarship is a direct response to the "North-South divide" that has historically structured global knowledge production and flows. In this divide, knowledge production has overwhelmingly taken place in the North, while the South has primarily been positioned as a passive recipient of that knowledge. This imbalance is not merely a matter of intellectual inequality but also has real-world implications for policy, governance, and development strategies. The KNB Scholarship actively challenges this by providing opportunities for scholars from the Global South to pursue higher education in Indonesia, where they can produce academic writings and research enriched by Indonesia's educational approach and grounded in their own local perspectives and realities. By allowing scholars from diverse developing nations to come together, the KNB program provides an invaluable space for the creation of alternative knowledge frameworks that reflect the lived realities, cultures, and histories of the Global South, thus redefining knowledge production. This process of epistemic decolonization is essential not only for empowering individuals but also for reimagining

development and global governance in a way that is more inclusive and representative of the diverse experiences of the Global South. Encouraging the development of epistemic autonomy by giving participants the tools and platforms to engage critically with Western knowledge systems through Global South lens, particularly through Indonesia's world view, this empowerment, in turn, creates new possibilities for intellectual and developmental strategies that are more in tune with the realities and aspirations of Global South nations.

In practice, the KNB Scholarship has led to numerous success stories of scholarship recipients who have used their knowledge to contribute directly to local and regional development. For example, KNB scholars have engaged in the design of sustainable development initiatives that address issues such as climate change, food security, and healthcare in their home countries, drawing on both the academic training they received in Indonesia and their own indigenous knowledge systems. These projects serve as concrete examples of how the KNB program is fostering the creation of alternative knowledge that is both locally relevant and globally impactful. In this way, the KNB program does not simply challenge Western-centric epistemologies; it also actively builds the intellectual capacities of the Global South to craft their own solutions to the challenges they face.

Notable example is the case of Dr. Muyanja Ssenyonga Z. Jameaba, a KNB recipient from Uganda who pursued a Master in Public Policy and Administration at Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). He shared that being African, particularly Ugandan, enables him to offer distinct insights into "*how subjects are taught in Indonesia and the other way around* (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.21-22)." This exposure to diverse perspectives and alternative epistemologies disrupts traditional hierarchies and promotes a more inclusive approach to knowledge production.

Secondly, the program fosters equitable partnerships, as Sanjaya Lall (1985) conceptualized.. The KNB Scholarship promotes SSC based on principles of mutual respect, equality, and shared development goals. Unlike traditional North-South programs that often perpetuate dependency, the Indonesian government emphasizes collaborative learning and knowledge exchange that benefits both Indonesia and participating countries (Rahasimamonjy, 2022). Indeed, a significant contribution of the program lies in its potential to challenge the imbued knowledge power dynamics shaped by colonialism.

By facilitating transformative exchanges among scholars from developing countries, the program challenges traditional power structures, aligning with constructivist views that norms and identities evolve through interaction. In doing so, it promotes knowledge and cultural exchange that challenges Global North-dominated norms, fostering a more equitable and diverse intellectual landscape.

KNB Scholarship, without question, challenges these institutionalized power structures by providing a platform for cross-

cultural academic exchange in Indonesia. The program fully embraces the concept of "situated knowledges" (Haraway, 1988) and recognizes the significance of "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault, 1980), which are typically marginalized within mainstream academic frameworks. By aligning itself with the movement towards knowledge decolonization, the program forcefully contests the flawed assumption that Western epistemologies alone are universally valid. By unequivocally providing a platform for students to study in Indonesia and engage with diverse local knowledge systems, it dismantles traditional knowledge hierarchies and decisively creates space for a multitude of epistemic perspectives.

An example is Mr. Thipphongphat Manivong from Laos, who pursued a Master's in Sports Education at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI). He gained expertise in martial arts, particularly Pencak Silat, and plans to establish a training center in Vientiane. Alongside his studies, he immersed himself in traditional Indonesian arts, including Madura dances, Surabaya songs, and musical instruments like Gamelan and Angklung. His story embodies the Bandung Spirit, as the knowledge he gained in Indonesia has contributed to sports development in Laos, particularly in Olympic training and general sports preparation. His efforts bore fruit as Laos achieved success in Pencak Silat at various international competitions and facilitated cooperation between the Laos Ministry of Education and the Indonesian Embassy in sports and culture, providing uniforms and funds for

the Laos Pencak Silat team. Proficient in Indonesian, he served as a referee, team manager, interpreter, and translator. In 2014, he assisted the Timor Leste team at the 16th ASEAN University Games (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, pp. 41–42).

Figure 11. Lao PDR's Pencak Silak Players Photo Session

Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p. 41).

Thirdly, the program empowers scholars from the Global South. By providing access to quality education and research opportunities, the program enhances the capacity of these scholars to contribute to knowledge production, innovation, and development in their home countries. KNB alumni become agents of change, driving progress and development in their respective fields.

The cases of KNB scholars Meaza Haddis Gebeyehu from Ethiopia and Hang Nguyen Thi Thu from Vietnam provide strong examples of how the program empowers scholars from the Global South. Gebeyehu pursued a Master's in International Trade Law at Universitas Indonesia (UI), overcoming the challenge of studying in Indonesian, graduating cum laude (DGHE-RT

MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.23). Nguyen, after completing a Master's in Indonesian Language Education at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang (UMM), became a lecturer at Ho Chi Minh City Open University, gaining confidence through her teaching practice (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.29-30).

Capacity building, as conceptualized in the KNB program, is deeply tied to sustainable development across political, social, and economic dimensions. The program equips students with knowledge that is academically rigorous and practically relevant to addressing complex Global South issues such as climate change, inequality, and global health. As Robert Chambers (2005) asserts, development should be a locally driven process, with knowledge production emerging from the bottom up rather than being externally imposed.

The KNB program empowers scholars to craft contextually relevant, sustainable solutions, enhancing their countries' developmental sovereignty and epistemic autonomy, and enabling them to shape their own futures without relying on foreign development models. The KNB Scholarship also plays a crucial role in capacity building for sustainable development, a key priority in the global development agenda. Sustainability demands a systems approach that integrates economic, social, and environmental factors and involves diverse actors in decision-making (Morrow & Rondinelli, 2002). By training scholars from across the Global South, the KNB program equips recipient countries with advanced knowledge and skills in areas such as environmental science, renewable

energy, public health, and social entrepreneurship—contributing to locally grounded, sustainable development solutions.

Take, for instance, Mojtaba Maktabifard—a KNB graduate with a master's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Institut Teknologi Bandung—who is now advancing sustainable and energy-efficient technologies at R2M Solution (n.d.), illustrating the program's tangible role in global development. Moreover, by centering knowledge exchange within the Global South, the KNB program nurtures alternative epistemologies and supports a shift toward a more equitable and multipolar world order.

Table 5. Study Programs and Majors offered in KNB Scholarship

Study Program	Majors
Humanity	• Humanity • Literary Studies • Linguistics • History • Philosophy • Anthropology • Cultural Studies
Engineering	• Chemical Engineering • Civil Engineering • Architectural Engineering • Electrical Engineering • Naval Architect & Marine Engineering • Environmental Engineering • Mechanical Engineering • Computer Engineering • Information Engineering

Sciences	• Biology
	• Biotechnology
	• Food Science
	• Physics
	• Geography
	• Geology
	• Forestry
	• Chemistry
	• Marine Science
	• Biomedical Sciences
	• Remote Sensing
	• Computer
	• Mathematics
	• Statistics
	• Environmental Sciences
	• Public Health
	• Sports Science
	• Pharmacy
	• Nursing
	• Agricultural & Aquacultural Science
	• Disaster Risk Management
	• Library and Information Science
Social Sciences	• Public Administration
	• Political Science
	• Public Policy
	• Civics
	• Ethics
	• Sociology
	• Psychology
	• Demography
	• Law
	• Business
	• Religion Study
	• Economics Development
	• Communication & Media
	• International Relations
	• Accounting
	• Management
	• Community Empowerment
Arts	• Fashionary Arts
	• Culinary Arts
	• Visual Arts
	• Performing Arts

Education	• Educational Science
	• Social Science Education
	• Sports Science Education
	• Natural Science Education
	• Islamic Education
	• Mathematics Education
	• School Teacher Education
	• Out of School / Non-formal Education
	• Applied Linguistics
	• Language Education
	• History Education
	• Arts Education
	• Music Education
	• Instructional Education
	• Educational Management
	• Educational Research
	• Vocational & Technology Education

Source: (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2024, p. 26-108).

Fourth, tapping into a bold idea that "there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice" (de Sousa Santos, 2014, p. 42), the program becomes a powerful instrument for advancing this epistemic justice. It disrupts traditional hierarchies of knowledge by centering Global South epistemologies—promotes the sharing of best practices, innovative solutions, and contextualized knowledge that address the specific needs and challenges of developing countries. This exchange enriches global perspectives and fosters a respectful dialogue aimed at mutual emancipation. Additionally, the program builds capacity and promotes sustainable development by prioritizing

academic fields relevant to the development needs of participating countries, such as engineering, agriculture, and healthcare. This ensures that scholars acquire knowledge and skills directly applicable to addressing development challenges.

KNB Scholarship Program is designed to foster equitable exchange between the Global South, focusing on building capacity and promoting knowledge sharing that benefits both Indonesia and the recipient countries. The KNB Scholarship fosters knowledge production deep-seated in local contexts and experiences, advancing epistemic decolonization. The concept of epistemic autonomy, as put forth by scholars like Scanlon (1972), Code (1991), Fricker (2006), Zagzebski (2007), McMyler (2011), and Ahlstrom-Vij (2013, 92), further illuminates the critical role of the KNB Scholarship in the decolonization of knowledge.

For instance, Otaigo Elisha, a KNB Scholarship recipient from Tanzania, pursued a Master of Science in Natural Resource and Environmental Economics at Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB) University. As one of the founders of NovFeed, a non-profit Tanzania-based organization that focuses on food security and sustainable fish farming, Otaigo shared how studying in Indonesia, supported by the KNB Scholarship, inspired him to establish NovFeed, as he stipulated, "*was born in Indonesia*" (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.17-18). Decolonization (Bonn, 1932) and deglobalization (Bello, 2001) are key concepts for understanding the KNB Scholarship Program within global knowledge production. The intellectual capital generated through the KNB program helps create a cadre of well-trained experts who can engage in multilateral policy discussions and strengthen the position of developing countries in global governance institutions. It plays a key role in fostering the "counter-hegemonic" knowledge production discussed by scholars such as Wallerstein (2004).

Table 6. Selected Academic Outputs and Intellectual Contributions of KNB Scholars by Global South Subregions

Global South Subregions	Scholars, Country	Degree Program	Article / Thesis / Dissertation	In-text Citation
Central America	**Daniel Antonio Cabrera, Mexico**	**Master of Education in Music Arts Education**	*Pengaruh Musik Amerika Latin Terhadap Indonesia (Influence of Latin America's Music in Indonesia)*	**(Cabrera, 2020)**
South America	**Edixon Daniel Ortiz Villamizar, Colombia**	**Master of Science in Chemistry Engineering**	*Bio-oil Synthesis from Botryococcus braunii by Microwave-assisted Pyrolysis*	**(Villamizar, 2021)**
Northern Africa	**Sohila Ahmad Esmatt, Egypt**	**Master of Education in Arabic Language Education**	*Al-'amiyah wa al-fusha baina al-khiyal wa al-waqi (Colloquial and Classical Arabic: Between Theories and Applications)*	**(Esmatt, 2024)**
Sub-saharan Africa	**Otaigo Elisha, Tanzania**	**Master of Science in Natural Resource and Environmental Economics**	*Analysis of Production and Consumption of Palm-Oil Based Biofuel using System Dynamics Model: Case of Indonesia*	**(Elisha et al., 2019)**
Middle East	**Heba Wadi, Palestine**	**Master of Arts in Literature and Cultural Studies**	*Features of Resistance Literature in the Palestinian Literature: Ghassan Kanafani's Works as Examples*	**(Wadi, 2020)**
Central Asia	**Shaukat Rahman Ansari, Afghanistan**	**Bachelor of Science in Economics and Developmental Studies**	*Causality Test between Foreign Aid and Economic Growth: The Case of Afghanistan*	**(Ansari, 2023)**
South Asia	**Arefin Islam Sourav, Bangladesh**	**Master of Science in Informatics**	*Smart System Architecture Design in the Field of Precision Agriculture Based on IoT in Bangladesh*	**(Sourav, 2020)**
Southeast Asia	**Raisalam Delos Trico Angoy, Philippines**	**Doctor of Education in Sports Education**	*An Insight into 3Ps Coaches' Knowledge and Its Integration to Coaching Practice and Sports Training Program: Filipino Context*	**(Angoy et al., 2024)**
Oceania	**Inoke Raseru, Fiji**	**Masters of Arts in International Relations**	*Marketing Communication Strategy During Covid-19 on Tourism Attraction in Tamansari Village*	**(Raseru, 2023)**

The data reveal that the KNB Scholarship Program challenges the unidirectional knowledge flows that have traditionally been characteristic of North-South relations. Through its emphasis on fostering collaborations between scholars from the Global South, this allows for a multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and epistemologies to converge, breaking down the barriers that have kept non-Western knowledge systems at the periphery of global intellectual debates. As such, the KNB Scholarship contributes not only to the diversification of knowledge production but also to the emergence of a more pluralistic, democratic global intellectual order. Epistemic violence has not only hindered the development of alternative worldviews but also simplified complex social structures into binaries, like the state/civil society divide, consolidating Western power (Meneses, 2005). The KNB Program, however, seeks to integrate indigenous knowledge with academic research by encouraging scholars to merge scientific inquiry with traditional wisdom (See Table 6). This approach fosters an environment where local knowledge is respected and seen as complementary to global academic paradigms. The synergy between scientific research and indigenous knowledge creates hybrid forms of knowledge essential for tackling global challenges, especially those unique to the Global South, such as technological development, engineering innovation, climate change mitigation and adaptation, food sovereignty, and cultural preservation.

Figure 12. The Geography of Global South Knowledge Production via KNB Scholarship Program

Rejecting the Global North's monopoly on knowledge is crucial for global justice and equitable development. The KNB Scholarship contributes to this by promoting inclusivity and representation, addressing the underrepresentation of Global South scholars in global academic networks. By offering qualified students from the Global South opportunities to engage with Indonesian academic institutions, the program strengthens cross-cultural exchanges and encourages new perspectives. As students return home, they bring not only technical knowledge but also the ability to shape local policies, ensuring that knowledge aligns with community needs. The KNB Scholarship also supports the internationalization of higher education in the Global South, fostering an educational ecosystem where developing countries are central to knowledge production, in line with postcolonial theory's emphasis on self-

determination and autonomy. From the perspective of knowledge decolonization, the KNB Scholarship promotes an intellectual and research culture integrated in the realities of the Global South, rather than Western ideals. By fostering a locally relevant, socially transformative research agenda, the program can drive a paradigm shift in knowledge production. Following this line of thought, it serves as a strategic intervention against the dominance of Western-centric knowledge systems, which, as Breidlid (2013) explains, permeate global education and uphold structural inequalities. By funding scholars from the Global South, the program disrupts academic neocolonialism and opens space for alternative, community-rooted epistemologies. Aligned with the goals of the Global Social Forum, which challenges neoliberal institutions and advocates for equitable global governance (Lumumba-Kasongo, 2010), the KNB program empowers scholars to resist the "master imaginary." In doing so, the program advances epistemic justice and fosters pluralism in global discourse and policy.

Figure 13. How KNB Scholarship Programs Redefines Global South Knowledge Production
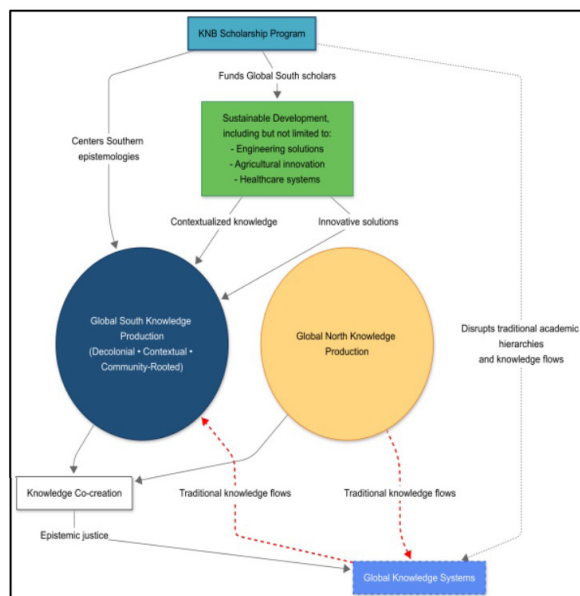
These findings point to the emergence of "KNB Diplomacy"—a model of decolonial soft power rooted in Indonesia's strategic use of the KNB Scholarship Program to foster educational, cultural, and geopolitical influence across the Global South. More than just a development assistance initiative, KNB Diplomacy reflects Indonesia's broader ambition to exercise agency in IR while positioning itself as a moral and intellectual leader among postcolonial nations. It challenges conventional understandings of soft power that are often rooted in Western liberalism and global hierarchies by promoting solidarity, cultural exchange, and knowledge-sharing on horizontal rather than hierarchical terms. Rather than imposing dominant norms, it opens a space where recipient scholars not only study in Indonesia but also share their own cultures and perspectives, contributing to a transnational dialogue among Global

South actors. This model aligns more closely with postcolonial frameworks that seek to dismantle asymmetrical power relations and redefine international cooperation through shared histories, mutual respect, and sovereign development goals.

Looking ahead, KNB Diplomacy may serve as a reference point for other Global South nations aspiring to engage in educational and cultural diplomacy that affirms their identities, priorities, and worldviews. As Indonesia continues to elevate its regional and global role, this model of engagement offers a powerful response to the enduring legacies of colonialism and intellectual dependency. If institutionalized further—with more inter-university collaboration, reciprocal exchanges, and inclusive narratives—KNB Diplomacy holds the potential to not only shape a new generation of transnational leaders but also contribute to the emergence of a more equitable, multipolar, and decolonized world order.

Table 7. Linking KNB Scholarship Features to Indonesia's Soft Power and Global South Knowledge Production

Features	How KNB Scholarship Program Redefines Indonesia's Soft Power	How KNB Scholarship Program Contributes to Global South Knowledge Production
Program Objective: To provide scholarships to students from developing countries to study in Indonesia.	Enhances the attractiveness of Indonesia as a study destination.	Provides opportunities for diverse perspectives in knowledge creation.
Target Beneficiaries: Students from the Global South	Fosters relationships with future leaders in developing nations.	Centers the program around the needs and perspectives of the Global South.
Scholarship Coverage: Tuition fees, living expenses, health insurance, and round-trip airfare.	Removes financial barriers, making the program accessible and attractive.	Enables participation of scholars who may lack resources in their home countries.
Program Focus: Promoting South-South cooperation (SSC), empowering scholars from developing countries, and facilitating knowledge exchange.	Positions Indonesia as a leader in South-South cooperation (SSC).	Directly addresses the power imbalances in knowledge production.
Expected Outcomes: Enhanced human capital development in developing countries, strengthened diplomatic ties, and increased cultural exchange	Creates a network of alumni who are goodwill ambassadors for Indonesia.	Fosters a more balanced and inclusive global knowledge landscape.

KNB DIPLOMACY

Conclusion and Recommendations

As the global order shifts toward multipolarity, educational diplomacy has become vital for the Global South to assert sovereignty and promote equitable global governance. The KNB Scholarship Program exemplifies this by expanding educational access, fostering SSC, and challenging Western-centric knowledge frameworks. Rooted in Bandung Conference principles, it advances intellectual autonomy and strengthens Indonesia's diplomatic influence in shaping a more inclusive, decolonized global order. This study demonstrates that the

KNB Scholarship Program plays a significant role in redefining Indonesia's soft power and knowledge production— establishing what can be recognized as KNB Diplomacy. While the KNB Scholarship Program expands access for the Global South, it may not fully address the persistent Western epistemic violence in educational systems. Efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), while valuable, have been criticized, emphasizing that DEI initiatives often address only superficial diversity without confronting deeper power structures in global knowledge production. True decolonization requires not just inclusion but a fundamental shift in the structures of knowledge production that uphold unequal global power dynamics. Nevertheless, the KNB Scholarship is a significant step toward decolonizing IR and knowledge production. By confronting colonial legacies, it offers a transformative opportunity to break free from dominant epistemic frameworks. It empowers scholars from the Global South to reconnect with their cultural and intellectual contexts, reclaiming indigenous knowledge systems long marginalized by Western thought. Decolonizing knowledge, therefore, is not only about critiquing Western paradigms but reimagining the intellectual canon to include diverse, often silenced, perspectives. That is to say, to further enhance its impact, the program should:

- Expand language training and academic support services for scholars to integrate more structured mentorship programs to ease cultural and academic transitions.

- Conduct longitudinal studies on the career trajectories of KNB alumni to measure long-term influence.
- Strengthen research collaboration between Indonesian universities and institutions in recipient countries.

Hence, the KNB Scholarship can serve as a successful model for South-South educational cooperation, contributing to a more balanced and inclusive global knowledge ecosystem.

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