

THE KEMITRAAN NEGARA BERKEMBANG (KNB) DIPLOMACY: LEVERAGING SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM TO ADVANCE INDONESIA'S EPISTEMIC SOFT POWER IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkonseptualisasikan beasiswa dari pemerintah Indonesia, yaitu Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB), sebagai bentuk infrastruktur epistemik yang menantang fondasi hubungan internasional yang berpusat pada Barat dan merekonfigurasi Kerjasama Selatan-Selatan. Berlandaskan pada konstruktivisme, teori Global South, epistemologi dekolonial, dan diplomasi pluriversal, studi ini menggunakan desain kualitatif melalui analisis dokumen, narasi alumni, dan refleksi autoetnografis. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa KNB mengoperasionalkan visi tatanan global yang non-blok dan pasca-hegemonik dengan memfasilitasi mobilitas akademik lintas budaya, melegitimasi sistem pengetahuan lokal, dan membina cendekiawan-diplomat sebagai agen diplomasi non-negara. Studi ini menyimpulkan bahwa Diplomasi KNB memperkuat kepemimpinan normatif Indonesia dan menawarkan kerangka kerja yang dapat direplikasi untuk kerja sama internasional yang etis, plural, dan transformatif yang berlandaskan pada keadilan epistemik.

Abstract

This research conceptualizes Indonesia's Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship Program as an epistemic infrastructure that challenges the Western-centric foundations of international relations (IR) and reconfigures South-South cooperation (SSC). Anchored in constructivism, Global South theory, decolonial epistemologies, and pluriversal diplomacy, the study adopts a qualitative design using document analysis, alumni narratives, and autoethnographic reflection. The findings demonstrate that KNB operationalizes a non-aligned, post-hegemonic vision of global order by facilitating cross-cultural academic mobility, legitimizing indigenous knowledge systems, and cultivating scholar-diplomats as non-state agents of diplomacy. The study concludes that KNB Diplomacy strengthens Indonesia's normative leadership and offers a replicable framework for ethical, plural, and transformative international cooperation grounded in epistemic justice.



INTRODUCTION

In an era defined by the decline of Western hegemony and the rise of multipolarity, the Global South has begun to assert alternative paradigms of international engagement. Nowhere is this more evident than in the domain of educational diplomacy, where the flow of knowledge and mobility of scholars increasingly reflect power realignments and contestations of epistemic authority. Amidst this shifting landscape, Indonesia's *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang* (KNB) Scholarship Program has come to embody a tool of soft power and a vital epistemic infrastructure, through which the Global South reconstructs its agency in world affairs.

The KNB Scholarship Program can be understood as a strategic initiative by Indonesia, designed to support students from the Global South in accessing higher education opportunities at prominent Indonesian universities. Initially conceived as the *Gerakan Non-Blok* (GNB) Scholarship Program during the 10th Conference of Heads of State of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in September 1992, the program was first launched in 1993, targeting students from NAM member countries.

Over time, the scope of the scholarship evolved in response to growing global demand. In 2002, its regional exclusivity was lifted, and in 2006, it was renamed the *Kemitraan Negara Berkembang* (KNB) Scholarship Program, expanding its reach to students across Asia, the Pacific, South America, Africa, and Eastern Europe (Directorate General of Higher Education, Research and Technology, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, Republic of Indonesia (DGHE-RT, MoEC-RT, RI), 2021)

Unlike conventional North-South educational exchanges that often perpetuate asymmetrical dependencies, the KNB Scholarship Program reimagines international relations (IR) as a site of mutual empowerment rooted in the Bandung Spirit. By offering scholarships to students from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other parts of the developing world, Indonesia extends a diplomatic gesture that is simultaneously pedagogical, political, and postcolonial — challenging Western epistemic dominance by centering indigenous knowledge, promoting South-South solidarity, and reimagining global engagement beyond colonial legacies. Through linguistic immersion, cultural exchange, and community engagement, KNB

scholars become not only recipients of academic knowledge but also producers of decolonial epistemologies (Gerale, 2025).

Previous research on the KNB Scholarship Program has primarily focused on its relevance within the frameworks of nation branding. These studies consistently highlight Indonesia's strategic use of scholarships to promote goodwill, enhance bilateral relations, and elevate its international image (Indraswari, 2016; Brilyanti, 2021; Awaludin, 2024). Brilyanti (2021) for instance, situates the KNB program within broader debates on South-South Cooperation (SSC) and soft power, illustrating how it fosters alternative diplomatic alignments beyond Western-dominated frameworks. Research on the potential of SSC to reshape international education and redefine soft power dynamics also remains limited (Heryadi, Darmastuti, & Rachman, 2024).

While this literature provides a valuable foundation, it tends to foreground the diplomatic and symbolic dimensions of the program without fully interrogating its role as a structured epistemic infrastructure that redistributes epistemic agency and nurtures indigenous knowledge systems. In concrete terms, epistemic infrastructure refers to the institutional mechanisms,

networks, and knowledge-building practices—such as policies, academic programs, research outputs, and scholarly communities—that shape what is recognized as legitimate knowledge and who gets to produce it. Drawing from Bandola-Gill et al. (2022), epistemic infrastructure can be conceptualized across three levels: (1) the material level, including academic outputs, research reports, and curricular content; (2) the relational level, comprising transnational networks of scholars, universities, and policymakers; and (3) the normative level, which redefines the paradigms of global knowledge governance.

Building on his earlier work, Gerale (2025) introduces the concept of KNB Diplomacy, emphasizing the program's normative and symbolic dimensions, particularly in reshaping knowledge production within the Global South and repositioning Indonesia's soft power beyond Western paradigms. However, existing studies fall short by failing to conceptualize the KNB Scholarship Program as an intentional epistemic infrastructure—a deliberately designed system that challenges entrenched global cognitive hierarchies and fosters cognitive justice through educational diplomacy. This article addresses this gap by presenting a decolonial, epistemic justice-

oriented framework for understanding KNB Scholarship Program as a critical institutional platform for reimagining global knowledge cooperation in an increasingly multipolar world.

Moreover, this article proposes that KNB Diplomacy signals an emerging orientation toward post-hegemonic, pluriversal diplomacy—an approach that promotes coexistence among multiple worldviews and challenges the dominance of any single epistemology or civilization in shaping global governance. Rooted in the pursuit of epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007), pluriversal diplomacy, an approach to global engagement that acknowledges the existence of multiple realities, worldviews, and systems of knowledge, rather than subscribing to a singular, universal model rooted in Western modernity seeks to elevate indigenous, non-Western, and marginalized knowledge systems as equal participants in global dialogue. It challenges the myth of a "one-world" ontology—the assumption that there is only one valid reality or truth—and instead affirms the pluriverse, where diverse epistemologies and relational cosmovision coexist (Querejazu, 2016).

In doing so, the article offers new theoretical and empirical insights into how

educational programs can function as infrastructures for more inclusive and equitable forms of international engagement. Hence, centering on the tension between entrenched global knowledge hierarchies and the aspiration for equitable South-South exchange, the key research question guiding this inquiry is:

How does KNB Diplomacy, through the KNB Scholarship Program, operationalize a non-aligned, pluriversal vision of global governance by facilitating cross-cultural academic exchange, amplifying indigenous knowledge systems, and cultivating alumni from the Global South as non-state diplomatic actors?

ANALYSIS FRAMEWORK

To interrogate the KNB Scholarship Program as epistemic infrastructure and a tool of post-Westphalian diplomacy, this study draws from an interdisciplinary synthesis of four intersecting theoretical traditions: constructivism, Global South theory, decolonial theory, and pluriversal diplomacy. These frameworks help reconceptualize diplomacy not as a tool exclusive to states and coercive power, but as a multi-actor, knowledge-driven, and

ethically grounded process of global engagement.

Constructivism

Constructivism foregrounds the idea that norms, identities, and institutions in international relations are not fixed but socially constructed (Wendt, 1992). This perspective challenges Eurocentric narratives that have long framed the Global South as inferior or immature. The dominant epistemologies in IR have historically drawn from Enlightenment thinkers such as Kant and Hegel, whose conceptions of reason and civilization marginalized non-European societies (Kant, 1784; Hegel, 1955; Bernal, 1991). Far from being underdeveloped, these societies reflect alternative models of governance, knowledge, and culture that defy Western developmental teleologies (Bello, 2019). Constructivism allows us to deconstruct these biases by foregrounding the social production of norms and identities through educational diplomacy.

Programs like Indonesia's KNB Scholarship institutionalize norms of solidarity, reciprocity, and mutual learning, aligning with Knight's (2014) argument that academic mobility promotes constructive international engagement. These efforts resonate with Stoeckel's (2016) insights on

collective identity formation through inter-group exchange and support Zavarce Velasquez's (2024) view that SSC disrupts Northern dominance in global governance. By reconstructing the rules of engagement, such initiatives affirm the agency of the Global South in shaping pluriversal futures.

Global South Theory

The Global South, while often invoked as a geographic designation for postcolonial or developing nations, is more accurately understood as a positionality within global knowledge politics, shaped by enduring legacies of imperialism, racial capitalism, and epistemic exclusion. Coined by Oglesby (1969) to describe countries subjected to political and economic domination by the Global North, the term draws from a longer intellectual tradition rooted in the works of Hobson, Lenin, Gramsci, Du Bois, and later, anticolonial thinkers such as Nkrumah and Fanon. From this perspective, the Global South denotes not merely where a country is located, but how it is positioned within transnational hierarchies of power, legitimacy, and representation. It signals both a material condition and an epistemic standpoint from which to critique dominant global structures and advance alternative

visions of knowledge, development, and justice.

Emerging from the historical and conceptual development of the term Global South, Global South theory calls for the meaningful integration of Southern perspectives in reimagining global knowledge systems (Suwanbubha, 2005; Chen, 2010). Central to this reconfiguration is the decolonization of knowledge, a process that resists Eurocentrism (Amin, 1989) and Orientalism (Said, 1978), and instead uplifts indigenous epistemologies as advocated by Spivak (1988). Historically, Western-centric models of education and governance have often imposed frameworks misaligned with local contexts, echoing Fanon's (1952; 2008) critique of how colonial ideologies shaped the psyche and identity of the colonized. These epistemic impositions align with Escobar's (1995) rejection of universalist development narratives and underscore the necessity of promoting epistemic autonomy—the right of communities to generate knowledge grounded in their cultural and socio-economic realities (Raz, 1988; Demeter, 2020; Matheson, 2024). Such efforts reclaim what Foucault (1980, p. 84) terms "subjugated knowledges" by integrating indigenous epistemologies into

academic and development discourse, actively resisting Western epistemic imperialism as critiqued by Mignolo (1995) and Dussel (1995). Foundational to this decolonial turn are the works of de Sousa Santos (2014) and Dados & Connell (2012), which call for rethinking knowledge hierarchies. Sen's (1999) capability approach complements this by emphasizing development beyond economic growth, toward human potential and agency.

Development and education must be viewed through lenses that honor local histories and cultural systems, rather than through inherited Western paradigms, hence colonial legacies will be challenged and more equitable models of development through education, exchange, and epistemic justice will advance. This emerging consciousness of the Global South as a shared positionality—defined by historical subjugation, economic dependency, and epistemic marginalization—crystallized in the 1955 Bandung Conference in Indonesia. As the birthplace of what would become the NAM, Bandung brought together newly decolonized nations committed to resisting both geopolitical domination and intellectual subordination. Bandung thus laid the foundation for a double project: securing

sovereignty from global political blocs and reclaiming the power to define one's own future—economically, culturally, and intellectually.

In this light, Indonesia's KNB Scholarship Program can be understood as part of Bandung's extended legacy, which promotes epistemic sovereignty by empowering scholars from the Global South to become agents of knowledge production, cooperation, and postcolonial solidarity. It can be seen as a contemporary realization of the Bandung Spirit, foregrounding epistemic solidarity as a mode of postcolonial development. One can reasonably argue that educational diplomacy initiatives in the Global South exemplify this reorientation, enabling SSC that addresses shared regional challenges through mutual learning (Khudori, 2006; Lai & Kan, 2020). Buzan et al. (1998) highlight how such cooperation fosters diplomatic ties grounded in education and cultural solidarity. Ultimately, as Foucault (1980) and Alcoff (1996; 2007) remind us, knowledge is not neutral; it is deeply intertwined with the power structures that shape what is validated as truth

Decolonial Theory and Epistemic Justice

Decolonial Theory offers a critical lens for analyzing and dismantling the enduring

legacies of colonialism embedded in contemporary systems of knowledge, power, culture, and society (Quijano, 2000). Emerging from the intellectual and lived experiences of the Global South, it challenges the dominance of Western epistemologies and seeks to reclaim marginalized worldviews, identities, and ways of knowing.

Historically, knowledge from the Global South has been treated as peripheral or derivative, shaping international policies, educational structures, and global power hierarchies. Education becomes a key site of contestation and transformation within this framework. Foucault's (1980) notion of epistemic power highlights how knowledge operates as a mechanism of control, reinforcing dominant paradigms. Decolonizing education, therefore, involves not just curricular changes but also philosophical shifts, as emphasized by Ntsobi (2024). As global development increasingly hinges on knowledge production (Ndlovu & Woldegiorgis, 2024), relocating epistemic authority to historically excluded regions becomes essential for advancing decolonial aims.

Walter Mignolo's (2010) concept of epistemic disobedience offers a useful lens to understand how KNB scholars actively resist dominant Western epistemologies by

producing knowledge grounded in their own sociocultural realities. This disobedience is not a rejection of knowledge per se, but a strategic act of reclaiming intellectual agency from within systems that have historically excluded them. 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 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).

By enabling scholars from the Global South to intervene in global knowledge systems, the KNB Program becomes a platform for challenging these enduring hierarchies—redistributing epistemic authority, legitimizing marginalized worldviews, and contributing to the broader decolonial project.

Pluriversal Diplomacy

Pluriversal IR, as articulated by Acharya (2014) and Escobar (2020), promotes the coexistence of diverse worldviews, value systems, and diplomatic practices within the global order. Pluriversal diplomacy, grounded in this vision, emphasizes horizontal cooperation, intercultural dialogue, and epistemic diversity—challenging the Eurocentric norms and hierarchical structures of traditional diplomacy (Dunford, 2017; Latour, 2017). Rather than assuming a single model of development or rationality, it embraces multiple civilizational logics, especially those rooted in the Global South.

The notion of the pluriverse, central to this approach, posits that the world is not singular but composed of many coexisting lifeworlds (Escobar, 1995; Mignolo, 1995). As such, diplomacy must move beyond extractive power asymmetries, fostering relationships rooted in cultural humility, spiritual respect, and knowledge pluralism.

This paradigm emerges within the shifting contours of the Post-Westphalian Order. While the 1648 Westphalian system privileged state sovereignty and nation-states as central actors, the 21st century has seen this model erode due to globalization, the rise of non-state actors, and transnational

challenges. In this evolving landscape, diplomacy is no longer confined to state-to-state interactions but includes civil society, academia, indigenous groups, and other epistemic communities. Pluriversal diplomacy, therefore, aligns with the post-Westphalian shift by advocating for a multipolar, multi-epistemic world where engagement is guided by mutual understanding, epistemic justice, and solidarity—not domination or universalist assumptions.

Importantly, this pluriversal orientation resonates with the principles of Indigenous Diplomacy (Beier, 2016), which likewise emphasizes relationality, non-hierarchical negotiation, and the stewardship of knowledge rooted in place-based ontologies. As a parallel logic to pluriversality, it foregrounds forms of engagement that are intergenerational, reciprocal, and anchored in the ethical responsibilities of care and coexistence (Carpenter & Tsykarev, 2021).

The KNB Scholarship Program operationalizes this vision by fostering academic mobility from the Global South, cultivating multilingual, multicultural cohorts of scholar-diplomats, and building alumni networks that span continents. These networks, in turn, serve as living infrastructures of South-South dialogue—

sustaining exchanges of local, traditional, indigenous knowledge, policy innovation, and transnational solidarity long after formal study ends.

Theoretical Synthesis and Positioning

Taken together, these four frameworks do not merely coexist but interact dialectically, each addressing distinct yet overlapping dimensions of the KNB Scholarship Program's role in global diplomacy. Their intersection enables a richer analysis of how educational exchanges serve both as mechanisms of normative contestation and as instruments of epistemic transformation.

Rather than viewing KNB Diplomacy solely through a utilitarian lens of statecraft or development aid, this interdisciplinary synthesis foregrounds the program's potential to unsettle entrenched power asymmetries and cultivate new spaces of diplomatic engagement. In concert, these frameworks reveal how KNB operates at the intersection of knowledge production, soft power, and global governance—reshaping hierarchies of knowledge and power, fostering SSC, and advancing a more pluralistic and just IR landscape.

This study explores how KNB challenges dominant Westphalian logics of

sovereignty, power, and knowledge production. In doing so, the article contributes to an emerging body of scholarship that seeks to decenter IR from its Eurocentric foundations and reimagine it as a field constituted by multiple epistemologies, non-state actors, and horizontal solidarities.

As Indonesia positions itself as a diplomatic innovator in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, the KNB Scholarship Program makes its recipients ambassadors of a pluriversal world order and signals the birth of a new form of diplomacy—KNB Diplomacy—one that prioritizes ethical partnership, cognitive justice, and post-hegemonic cooperation (Gerale, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist research design to explore KNB Diplomacy through KNB Scholarship Program, which can be seen as a form of epistemic infrastructure and an instrument of post-Westphalian diplomacy. Given the conceptual and empirical depth of the inquiry—situated at the intersection of IR, Global South solidarity, and educational diplomacy—a qualitative approach allows for a nuanced understanding of meanings, narratives, and lived experiences.

This case study adopts a multi-scalar lens (Dopfer, Foster, & Potts, 2004; Blackstone, 2012; Williamson, 2015), examining KNB's operations across micro (scholar/alumni), meso (institutional/university), and macro (national and transnational policy) levels.

Four data sources are triangulated to enhance validity: (1) Policy and Institutional Documents: Analysis includes official reports from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, as well as from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, KNB annual reports, and ASEAN declarations involving education and diplomacy. These are critically examined as discursive tools framing education within broader strategies of soft power and SSC. (2) Alumni Testimonies: Sourced from KNB tracer studies, online testimonials, interviews, and public reflections, alumni narratives are interpreted as discursive acts of norm entrepreneurship that embody cultural diplomacy and epistemic agency. (3) Scholarly Outputs by KNB Scholars: Theses, dissertations, and academic articles authored by KNB recipients are examined for themes of knowledge production, epistemic autonomy, and post-Western theoretical engagement. (4) Autoethnographic Insight:

The study incorporates analytic autoethnography (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2010) drawing on the researcher's own experience as a KNB scholar. This positionality enables a reflexive interrogation of lived experiences, identity formation, knowledge politics within Indonesia's higher education environment, and intercultural learning and insider-outsider tensions in Global South academic settings.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) is conducted by combining inductive coding from empirical materials with deductive categories derived from theoretical frameworks. Analytical categories include: (1) diplomatic soft power; (2) SSC; (3) decolonial practice; and (4) epistemic autonomy.

The study acknowledges limitations, including potential subjectivity due to the researcher's positionality, limited longitudinal alumni data, and context-specific findings. However, these are addressed through source triangulation and reflexive analysis. Positionality is not seen as a bias, but as a lens that enriches understanding of the epistemic and diplomatic dynamics at play.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

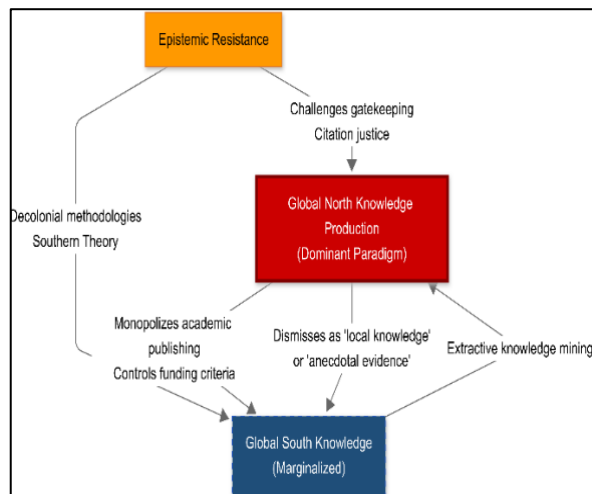
This section presents and analyzes the key findings that illustrate how the KNB Diplomacy, through the KNB Scholarship Program, functions as epistemic infrastructure, contributes to post-Westphalian diplomacy, and catalyzes a reconfiguration of South-South relations. Drawing from official documents, alumni testimonies, and academic outputs produced by KNB scholars, four core themes emerge: (1) epistemic autonomy and counter-hegemonic knowledge production, (2) scholar-diplomats and people-to-people diplomacy, (3) the localization of Indonesian soft power, and (4) Indonesia's strategic repositioning within Global South diplomacy.

Epistemic Autonomy and Counter-Hegemonic Knowledge Production

The KNB Diplomacy actively reorients academic knowledge production away from Global North epistemological dominance (See Figure 1) by enabling scholars from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other developing regions to conduct research grounded in both their lived realities and Indonesian perspectives. The findings on the geography of knowledge production through the KNB Scholarship Program illustrate how this initiative contributes to a

broader South-South academic exchange network.

Figure 1. Marginalization and Resistance in Global South–North Knowledge Relations, Gerale (2025)



Source: Gerale (2025)

As shown in Figure 2 and Table 1, KNB scholars originate from a wide range of Global South regions, including Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, Oceania, the Middle East, Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Africa, Central America, and South America. This geographical diversity highlights how the scholarship fosters transregional academic mobility and knowledge sharing. These scholars engage with local issues—ranging from renewable energy and environmental economics to indigenous arts and public health—producing what (de Sousa Santos, 2014) terms epistemologies of the South. Gerale (2025) documents numerous

instances of such outputs: a Colombian scholar working on bio-oil synthesis in Indonesia; a Tanzanian scholar establishing NovFeed, a sustainable fish-farming NGO inspired by Indonesia's aquaculture sector; and an Egyptian scholar advancing Arabic language pedagogy through comparative frameworks informed by Indonesian methods. These examples demonstrate how KNB scholars transcend passive learning roles, instead functioning as active agents of intellectual decolonization.

Figure 2. The Geography of Global South Knowledge Production via KNB Scholarship Program, Gerale (2025)



Source: Gerale (2025)

Scholar-Diplomats and People-to-People Diplomacy

A defining feature of KNB Diplomacy is its capacity to transform international students into informal diplomats or “scholar-diplomats,” whose lived experiences in Indonesia foster long-term affinities and intercultural bridges. These individuals play diplomatic roles upon return—not through embassies or foreign ministries, but through civil society engagement, educational networks, entrepreneurship, and public service. KNB alumni have taken on roles as

educators, researchers, policy advisors, and even cultural ambassadors.

For instance, Alith Jacob Majok Ayuen from South Sudan speaks of promoting Indonesian education and investment in his country; and Nguyen Thi Thu Hang from Vietnam develops Indonesian language programs at her university. These narratives reflect the practice of para-diplomacy—diplomatic engagement outside formal state channels—and support the notion that knowledge mobility is a strategic vector of foreign policy.

Table 1. 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	<i>Pengaruh Musik Amerika Latin Terhadap Indonesia (Influence of Latin America's Music in Indonesia)</i>	(Cabrera, 2020)
South America	Edixon Daniel Ortiz Villamizar, Colombia	Master of Science in Chemistry Engineering	<i>Bio-oil Synthesis from Botryococcus braunii by Microwave-assisted Pyrolysis</i>	(Villamizar, 2021)
Northern Africa	Sohila Ahmad Esmatt, Egypt	Master of Education in Arabic Language Education	<i>Al-'amiyah wa al-fusha baina al-khiyal wa al-waqi (Colloquial and Classical Arabic: Between Theories and Applications)</i>	(Esmatt, 2024)
Sub-saharan Africa	Otaigo Elisha, Tanzania	Master of Science in Natural Resource and Environmental Economics	<i>Analysis of Production and Consumption of Palm-Oil Based Biofuel using System Dynamics Model: Case of Indonesia</i>	(Elisha et al., 2019)
Middle East	Heba Wadi, Palestine	Master of Arts in Literature and Cultural Studies	<i>Features of Resistance Literature in the Palestinian Literature: Ghassan Kanafani's Works as Examples</i>	(Wadi, 2020)
Central Asia	Shaukat Rahman Ansari, Afghanistan	Bachelor of Science in Economics and	<i>Causality Test between Foreign Aid and Economic</i>	(Ansari, 2023)

		Developmental Studies	<i>Growth: The Case of Afghanistan</i>	
South Asia	Arefin Islam Sourav, Bangladesh	Master of Science in Informatics	<i>Smart System Architecture Design in the Field of Precision Agriculture Based on IoT in Bangladesh</i>	(Sourav, 2020)
Southeast Asia	Raisalam Delos Trico Angoy, Philippines	Doctor of Education in Sports Education	<i>An Insight into 3Ps Coaches' Knowledge and Its Integration to Coaching Practice and Sports Training Program: Filipino Context</i>	(Angoy et al., 2024)
Oceania	Inoke Raseru, Fiji	Masters of Arts in International Relations	<i>Marketing Communication Strategy During Covid-19 on Tourism Attraction in Tamansari Village</i>	(Raseru, 2023)

Source: Gerale (2025)

Figure 3. Lao PDR's Pencak Silak Players Photo Session



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

Another 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 (See Figure 3). 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).

Localization of Soft Power through Cultural Immersion

Viewed through this lens, the KNB Diplomacy constitutes a non-material form of international infrastructure—serving as an epistemic arm of Indonesia’s foreign policy—redefining Indonesia’s role in global diplomacy beyond the logic of state-centric realism. More than a diplomatic instrument, the program serves as a foundational

platform for reimagining global knowledge production and cooperation in a multipolar world through such soft architectures that Indonesia advances its *bebas-aktif* foreign policy and situates itself as a normative leader within SSC. Unlike top-down soft power models that project national identity outward, Indonesia’s KNB Diplomacy emphasizes bottom-up cultural immersion strategy.

Table 2. 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’s in Laws in International Trade Law Universitas Indonesia (UI)	<i>“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)</i>
Hend Farouk, Egypt	Master of Arts in Linguistics Studies, University of Muhammadiyah Surakarta (UMS)	<i>“In the first year, I took an Indonesian language course and completed it with satisfactory results.” (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.31)</i>
Uchenna Collins Agbarakwe, Nigeria	Master of Science in Management, Universitas Katolik Parahyangan (UNPAR)	<i>“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)</i>
Thipphongphat Manivong, Laos	Master of Education in Sports Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI)	<i>“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,</i>

			<i>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)</i>
Alith Jacob Majok Ayuen, South Sudan	Master of Science in Economic Science, Universitas Brawijaya (UB)		<i>“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)</i>
Khamson Lorxaypao, Lao PDR	Master of Education in Mathematics Education, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta (UNY)		<i>“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. I also learned and practiced traditional dance.” (DGHE-RT MoEC-RT, RI, 2021, p.56)</i>

Source: Gereale (2025)

Based on Table 2, through the *Bahasa Indonesia untuk Penutur Asing* (BIPA) program, KKN (community service), and university-organized cultural activities, scholars are not only taught about Indonesia—they live it. This embodied form of diplomacy nurtures emotional and cultural attachments that go beyond rational persuasion. In effect, scholars become multipliers of soft power, voluntarily narrating positive stories about Indonesia across digital platforms and professional networks, thus extending Indonesia's diplomatic reach organically. The use of

Bahasa Indonesia in academic and community settings, supported by the BIPA program, enables scholars to write, publish, and present knowledge in ways that challenge the hegemony of English as the sole language of international academia. Through this linguistic empowerment, KNB scholars embrace epistemic plurality and revalidate non-Western knowledge systems.

Repositioning Indonesia in the Architecture of Global South Diplomacy

Table 3 explains that the KNB Diplomacy contributes Indonesia's

leadership in 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. KNB Diplomacy 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.

Strategically, KNB Diplomacy supports Indonesia's vision of becoming a

normative leader in SSC. As per Table 4, while not a traditional donor country, Indonesia leverages educational initiative to assert influence through what can be called post-material diplomacy (Mahant, 2015)—engagement based on knowledge exchange, solidarity, and cultural respect rather than capital or coercion. Thus, it embodies a diplomacy of ideas in which Indonesia challenges the monopoly of the Global North over knowledge, development paradigms, and international legitimacy. By hosting scholars from over 100 countries, Indonesia also positions itself as an epistemic hub in the Indo-Pacific, contributing to the rebalancing of regional knowledge economies and fostering multipolar partnerships. This has implications for ASEAN leadership, South-South policy alliances, and Indonesia's broader diplomatic posture in the G20 and Global South fora.

Table 3. 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>"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</i>

		<p>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)</p>
Shadi Emad. A. Alhaleh, Palestine	Master of Science in Accounting, Universitas Negeri Malang (UM)	<p>"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)</p>
Niyomukiza John Bosco, Uganda	Master of Science in Civil Engineering, Universitas Diponegoro (UnDip)	<p>"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)</p>
Aboyitungiye J. Baptiste, Burundi	Master of Science in Economics, Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS)	<p>"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)</p>
Thipphongphat Manivong, Laos	Master of Education in Sports Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI)	<p>"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</p>

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)

Source: Gereale (2025)

Table 4. 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.

Source: Gereale (2025)

CONCLUSION

In a nutshell, KNB Diplomacy is a strategically constructed epistemic infrastructure that enables Indonesia to assert a unique form of diplomacy grounded in decolonial values, South-South solidarity, and pluriversal visions of international order. By empowering scholars from the Global South to pursue education in Indonesian universities, the program creates a dynamic

and reciprocal platform for rethinking the flows of knowledge, culture, and influence across borders.

In re-centering diplomacy around knowledge production, linguistic inclusivity, and cultural exchange, KNB Diplomacy disrupts the Westphalian norms of international relations and aligns more closely with a pluriversal, post-hegemonic global order. It demonstrates that true global

cooperation must go beyond power politics and toward ethical engagements rooted in respect, equity, and shared learning. Through it, Indonesia signals that development need not be mimetic of the West, and that leadership can emerge from educational solidarity rather than economic dominance.

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