

EDUCATION AS SOFT POWER: INDONESIA'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

MOBILITY AWARDS (IISMA) AND THE PRACTICE OF EDUCATIONAL

DIPLOMACY (2021-2023)

UNDERGRADUATE THESIS



**UNIVERSITAS
ISLAM
INDONESIA**

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2025

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As a partial fulfillment of requirement to earn

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the implementation of Indonesia's educational diplomacy through the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program from 2021 to 2023. Employing Joseph Nye's Soft Power theory and Jane Knight's Knowledge Diplomacy framework, this study examines how IISMA serves as a strategic tool for enhancing Indonesia's global image and promoting international cooperation through higher education mobility. The findings indicate that IISMA not only strengthens Indonesia's soft power by empowering students as informal cultural ambassadors but also promotes collaborative knowledge exchange and long-term relationship-building, aligning with the principles of knowledge diplomacy. The program demonstrates that educational exchanges can serve dual functions: advancing the internationalization of higher education while simultaneously contributing to the nation's diplomatic capital. However, the research also highlights several challenges, including limited pre-departure preparation, underrepresentation of marginalized groups, and insufficient post-program integration, which may hinder IISMA's optimal diplomatic impact. The study concludes that while IISMA has significant potential as an instrument of educational diplomacy, continuous improvement is necessary to ensure its sustainability, inclusivity, and alignment with Indonesia's broader foreign policy objectives.

Keywords: IISMA, Education Diplomacy, Soft Power, Knowledge Diplomacy

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I hereby declare that this undergraduate thesis is the result of my own independent scientific work, and that all material from the work of others (in books, articles, essays, dissertations, and on the internet) has been stated, and quotations and paraphrases are clearly indicated.

No other materials are used other than those contained. I have read and understood the university's rules and procedures regarding plagiarism.

Making false statements is considered a violation of academic integrity.

Monday, 4th of August 2025



Anshoriyah Fadillah

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

In recent years, the Indonesian government has increasingly emphasized the role of education as a strategic tool to enhance its global engagement and international standing (Kemendikbudristek 2023). One notable initiative reflecting this commitment is the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), a program designed to facilitate the outbound mobility of Indonesian university students to prestigious institutions worldwide (Kemendikbudristek 2023). Through IISMA, students are not only provided with academic exposure, they are also positioned as cultural representatives of Indonesia, tasked explicitly or implicitly with introducing the nation's values, traditions, and identity to the global community (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

However, implementing IISMA has given rise to several challenges that have sparked public discussion and critical reflection (Suharno 2023). Among the foremost concerns is the issue of equitable access. Many stakeholders have observed that opportunities for international study tend to be more accessible to students from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, thereby reinforcing existing educational inequalities within the country (Anwar and Setiawan 2022). The selection process, although designed to be competitive and merit-based, is often influenced by unequal access to preparatory resources, such as language training, academic counselling, and networking, advantages that are more readily available to students from urban and

well-resourced educational institutions (Putri 2023). This has raised important questions about whether international education programs, such as IISMA, can genuinely serve as inclusive platforms for all segments of Indonesian society (Putri 2023).

Another issue pertains to the alignment between the academic components of the program and the actual diplomatic or cultural objectives it aspires to achieve. There are instances where students struggle to integrate their courses abroad with their academic pathways at home, resulting in complications with credit transfer and degree completion (Kurniawan 2023). At the same time, the degree to which participants engage in meaningful cultural exchange or contribute to Indonesia's soft diplomacy has varied. While some awardees actively participate in cultural showcases, international conferences, or community engagements that reflect positively on Indonesia, others may approach their experience primarily as a personal or academic opportunity, with limited diplomatic impact (Kemendikbudristek 2023; Suharno 2023). This inconsistency underscores the need for more explicit guidance and structured programming to ensure that every participant can effectively assume the role of an informal ambassador (Anwar and Setiawan 2022).

Moreover, while there is widespread acknowledgement of the transformative effects that international mobility can have on individual students, such as improving intercultural competence, language skills, and global outlook, less is known about the broader, long-term diplomatic benefits these individual experiences generate for the nation (Knight 2013). There is growing recognition that educational mobility, while personally enriching, does not automatically translate into stronger international

relations or improved national image unless it is strategically managed and followed through at institutional and policy levels (de Wit 2020). This gap between individual transformation and collective diplomatic outcomes is particularly significant for a country like Indonesia, which seeks to assert itself more prominently in regional and global arenas (Suharno 2023).

The broader context highlights the growing significance of education as a component of soft diplomacy in today's interconnected world (Nye 2004). Many developed and developing countries have recognized that academic exchange and educational cooperation are effective instruments for fostering mutual understanding, building international networks, and enhancing national influence without coercion or economic leverage (Knight 2013; de Wit 2020). In this regard, Indonesia's efforts to integrate education into its foreign policy toolkit through programs like IISMA are timely and necessary (Kemendikbudristek 2023). Nevertheless, the lack of systematic evaluation and academic inquiry into the effectiveness of such programs in achieving diplomatic objectives reveals a significant research gap (Anwar and Setiawan 2022).

Existing studies on student mobility in Indonesia have primarily focused on the personal development of participants, such as their intercultural competence or employability, without adequately exploring the potential diplomatic benefits that international education programs may yield (Putri 2023; Kurniawan 2023). There is also limited discussion on how these educational exchanges strategically communicate Indonesia's unique cultural assets, values, and national narratives (Knight 2013). Additionally, while numerous countries have established robust frameworks to align international student mobility with national branding and foreign policy goals, similar

efforts in the Indonesian context are still in the early stages and remain under-researched (de Wit 2020).

Given these gaps, an urgent need is to critically examine how educational mobility through IISMA contributes to Indonesia's broader diplomatic objectives (Anwar and Setiawan 2022). This includes assessing not only the direct experiences of student participants, but also the program's potential to foster long-term international collaborations, shape global perceptions of Indonesia, and enhance the country's soft power (Nye 2004; Knight 2013). Furthermore, evaluating how the program can be made more inclusive and impactful is crucial to ensure it serves as a genuine vehicle of educational diplomacy rather than a symbolic or elite-driven initiative (Suharno 2023).

This study focuses on IISMA because it is Indonesia's most prominent and institutionally supported outbound academic mobility program, intentionally designed with diplomatic and cultural objectives. Its strategic framework, governmental endorsement, and global reach make it an ideal case to explore how education operates as a soft diplomacy tool. Moreover, its recent implementation and limited academic scrutiny offer a timely opportunity for critical analysis.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to offer insights into how Indonesia can more effectively leverage education as an instrument of diplomacy (de Wit 2020). By examining the intersections between student mobility, cultural promotion, and international engagement, this study aims to contribute to both academic discourse and policy development in educational diplomacy (Knight 2013). It aspires to provide a comprehensive understanding of how programs like IISMA can

be optimized to enrich individual learning experiences and advance Indonesia's position in the global community through sustained and meaningful educational engagement (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

Ultimately, this study seeks to highlight that in the contemporary international landscape, where ideas, values, and perceptions are as influential as military or economic power, education serves not only as a means of human capital development but also as a subtle yet powerful tool of diplomacy (Nye 2004). As Indonesia continues to navigate its role on the global stage, ensuring that its educational diplomacy efforts are strategic, inclusive, and impactful will be essential for fostering lasting international relationships and enhancing national prestige (Suharno 2023).

1.2 Research Question

How did the Indonesia government utilise the IISMA program as an instrument of soft power and educational diplomacy during 2021-2023?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To analyze the role of IISMA as an instrument of Indonesian educational diplomacy;
2. To examine the application of soft power and internationalization theories in the context of IISMA; and
3. To identify IISMA's contribution to Indonesia's global visibility and influence.

1.4 Research Scope

This study focuses on the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program from 2021 to 2023. It examines how IISMA contributes to Indonesia's educational diplomacy efforts, using Joseph Nye's soft power theory to explain the strategic significance of education in diplomacy, and Jane Knight's concept of knowledge diplomacy to analyze how the program is implemented as a form of international engagement. The research scope is limited to policy-level and institutional analysis based on official documents, public communications, and secondary data. It does not involve primary data collection through interviews with alumni or direct participant observation, and it does not aim to evaluate the academic performance or personal experiences of IISMA awardees.

1.5 Literature Review

Dewi and Dewi have given an insightful analysis of how the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) serves as a platform for advancing cultural diplomacy. In their study titled "Empowering Cultural Diplomacy: Indonesian International Mobility Awards (IISMA) Students on the World Stage," these authors explain that IISMA participants act as informal ambassadors who promote Indonesian culture overseas. Awardees introduce international communities to Indonesia's heritage, values, and identity through traditional performances, culinary events, and cultural discussions. The authors emphasize that these people-to-people interactions significantly enhance Indonesia's soft power and global visibility. Their research highlights the importance of strategically managing student mobility programs, such as

IISMA, to align with broader diplomatic goals, echoing Joseph Nye's soft power framework and Jane Knight's concept of knowledge diplomacy (Dewi and Dewi 2025).

A complementary perspective is provided by Ad Dawya and Okvitawanli, who examined the broader societal impacts of the IISMA program in their paper "More Than Studying Abroad: The Impacts of Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) Program to Its Alumni and Society." They argue that, beyond academic achievement, IISMA contributes to shaping participants into globally minded individuals who embody Indonesian values. Alumni of the program often continue to serve as cultural ambassadors even after returning home, engaging in cross-cultural initiatives and strengthening Indonesia's ties with the international community. The authors suggest that these individual transformations extend Indonesia's global influence and create lasting people-to-people connections essential in contemporary public diplomacy. The study also identifies developing leadership skills, civic awareness, and global networks as indirect benefits that align with the nation's diplomatic aspirations (Dawya and Okvitawanli 2024).

Kristiana and Benito explore IISMA's dual function as an educational and cultural diplomacy vehicle. Their research titled "Implementasi Diplomasi Pendidikan dan Diplomasi Budaya melalui Program IISMA" describes IISMA as more than an academic mobility initiative; it is a deliberate strategy to build Indonesia's international image and national brand. The authors point out that by sending students to top universities abroad, IISMA enhances educational outcomes, fosters mutual understanding, and strengthens bilateral relationships. They further observed that the

program is crucial in shaping perceptions of Indonesia as a dynamic, culturally rich, and progressive nation. However, they also highlighted challenges, such as unequal access and limited institutional collaboration, that must be addressed to fully maximize IISMA's potential as a diplomatic tool. Their study provides valuable insights for policymakers seeking to leverage education for strategic international engagement (Kristiana and Benito 2023).

While the studies above have provided essential insights into IISMA's role in advancing cultural diplomacy, alumni development, and bilateral relations, most adopt a descriptive approach focused on participant experiences or cultural outputs. These studies tend to highlight the outcomes of individual engagement rather than examining the program as a structured diplomatic instrument within Indonesia's broader foreign policy framework. Moreover, they often analyze IISMA through a single theoretical lens, without integrating the strategic value of education (as soft power) and the operational mechanisms of international collaboration (as knowledge diplomacy).

This research fills that gap by offering a dual-theoretical analysis using Joseph Nye's soft power theory and Jane Knight's knowledge diplomacy framework to critically assess the design, implementation, and diplomatic potential of the IISMA program from 2021 to 2023. It contributes to academic discourse by evaluating how educational mobility is strategically utilized by the Indonesian government as a tool of diplomacy, and by identifying the structural limitations that prevent IISMA from fully realizing its soft power objectives.

1.6 Research Framework

Two theoretical frameworks were employed to provide a comprehensive analytical foundation in conducting this research on Indonesia's educational diplomacy through the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) for the period 2021–2023 (Knight 2022; Nye 2004).

The first theoretical foundation is Joseph Nye's Soft Power, which refers to a country's ability to achieve desired outcomes in international relations through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment (Nye 2004). Nye identifies three key sources of soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policies, which, when seen as legitimate and attractive, can enhance a country's influence. When these elements are perceived as legitimate and appealing by other countries, they can significantly improve a nation's influence on the global stage (Nye 2004). In the context of educational diplomacy, international student exchange programs, such as IISMA, serve as an essential instrument of soft power, shaping how the foreign public perceives Indonesia through exposure to its culture, values, and educational excellence (Nye 2004). Nye further outlines that the exercise of soft power involves three layers of communication in public diplomacy:

1. Daily communication - this refers to consistently sharing information to shape perceptions and correct misinformation.
2. Strategic messaging - this involves delivering targeted narratives that align with a country's values and objectives, aiming to build a favourable image.

3. Long-term relationship-building - this focuses on fostering trust and enduring connections through sustained engagement between nations and societies.

Applying this to IISMA, the program not only sends students abroad for academic purposes but also enables them to serve as informal ambassadors who project Indonesia's soft power through cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and people-to-people contact (Nye 2004; Nye 2008). The presence of Indonesian awardees abroad enhances the country's image, fosters diplomatic goodwill, and strengthens bilateral relationships in ways that military or economic power cannot achieve alone (Nye 2004).

To complement this, the second theoretical framework used in this research is Jane Knight's Knowledge Diplomacy, which specifically addresses the role of International Higher Education, Research, and Innovation (IHERI) in building and sustaining international relations (Knight 2022). It is important to clarify that, in the context of this research, Knowledge Diplomacy is used interchangeably with Educational Diplomacy. Knight's concept of Knowledge Diplomacy explicitly highlights the role of international higher education, research, and innovation in fostering international relations. However, its objectives and underlying principles align closely with the broader notion of educational diplomacy. Both frameworks emphasize the use of education to build cross-border cooperation, mutual understanding, and sustained international engagement. Therefore, throughout this study, both terms are complementary and refer to the strategic use of education as a diplomatic tool.

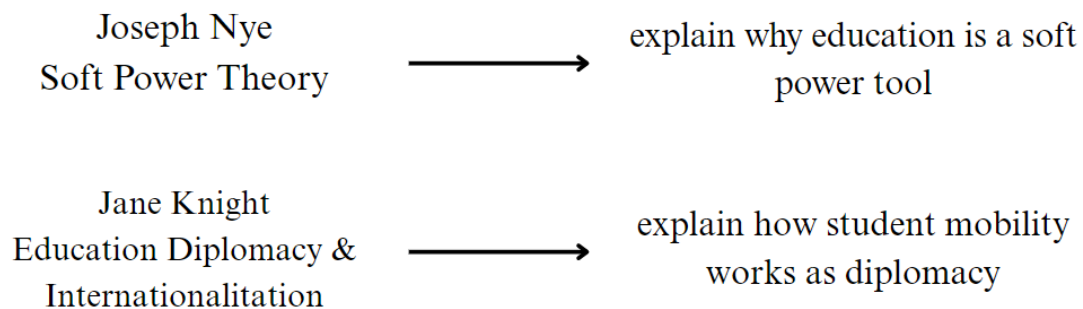
Knight defines knowledge diplomacy as a process whereby countries engage in educational, research, and innovation partnerships not solely for soft power gains, but also for mutual capacity-building, trust enhancement, and the co-creation of knowledge (Knight 2022). This theory shifts the focus from unilateral influence to reciprocal and collaborative engagement, emphasising that international education is not merely about projecting national interests but also about creating shared global benefits (Knight 2022). Knight's conceptual framework of Knowledge Diplomacy is built upon five core dimensions:

1. Intentions and Rationales: these explain the underlying purpose of international cooperation, which is to advance national interests, build global capacity, and foster mutual understanding.
2. Actors and Partners: these highlight the importance of involving diverse stakeholders, such as governments, universities, local communities, and students.
3. Principles and Values: these refer to the ethical foundations of knowledge diplomacy: mutuality, reciprocity, trust, co-creation of knowledge, and respect.
4. Modes and Approaches: these focus on how cooperation is carried out, whether through student mobility, joint research, or cultural exchange.
5. Activities and Instruments: these refer to concrete actions such as seminars, cultural showcases, and community service.

These dimensions include mutuality, reciprocity, trust-building, co-creation of knowledge, and respect, which are fundamental to ensuring that international education serves as a collaborative diplomatic tool rather than a competitive or

exploitative mechanism (Knight 2022). These principles distinguish Knowledge Diplomacy from other forms of diplomacy by ensuring that international collaborations are not one-sided but generate positive outcomes for all parties involved. In the case of IISMA, this framework highlights how Indonesian students and their host institutions engage in meaningful academic and cultural exchanges that foster mutual understanding, strengthen international networks, and contribute to global knowledge sharing (Knight 2022).

Picture 1. Design of Research Framework



Sources: Knight (2022) and Nye (2004)

1.7 Provisional Argument

This research argues that the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) holds strong potential as an instrument of educational diplomacy, yet remains underutilised. Applying Joseph Nye's soft power theory, IISMA can attract and influence international audiences by promoting Indonesia's culture, values, and academic excellence through overseas student exchanges. Through Jane Knight's knowledge diplomacy framework, however, the program's limited diplomatic

guidance, cultural engagement, and follow-up mechanisms reveal gaps in translating mobility into sustained diplomatic capital. When strategically aligned with both frameworks, IISMA could serve not only as an academic exchange but also as a deliberate tool for enhancing Indonesia's global influence and partnerships.

1.8 Research Method

1.8.1 Type of the Research

The type of research used in this study is qualitative. The qualitative research method explains the results of analyzing an event or phenomenon. In qualitative research, the usual approach is to define, describe, or analyze an event considered necessary.

1.8.2 Subject and Object of the Research

This research focuses on the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) and its role in supporting Indonesia's public diplomacy efforts. It examines how the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology implements IISMA as a strategy to enhance the country's global visibility through higher education exchange.

1.8.3 Method of Data Collection

The data collection method the author used to obtain sources or references needed for analysis was a literature review, encompassing books, news articles, journals, reliable official websites, reports, and papers.

1.8.4 Process of the Research

The research process had a systematic planning stage that initiated a research activity. This process included preliminary activities before data was collected, and then was followed by analysis and the formulation of conclusions based on the collected data. The stages carried out in this research include:

1. Pre-Research Stage

This stage involved all preparatory activities conducted before the implementation of the research, such as reviewing previous research and studying relevant literature from credible sources.

2. Data Collection

Data was gathered from various secondary sources, including previous research reports, reference books, academic journals, websites, and other supporting documents related to the research topic.

3. Data Analysis

Once the data had been collected, the next step was to conduct a critical and systematic analysis with the research focus outlined in this study.

1.9 Thesis Outline

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The author explains the background, problem formulation, research objectives, research scope, literature review, theoretical basis, methodology, and systematic discussion of the research conducted.

CHAPTER 2: INDONESIA'S EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMACY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS, NATIONAL APPROACH, AND THE ROLE OF IISMA

This chapter provides an overview of educational diplomacy and discusses the IISMA Program as a strategic tool within this framework.

CHAPTER 3: ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMACY IN THE IISMA PROGRAM 2021-2023

This chapter consists of three main discussions. The first is an analysis of the diplomatic importance of education based on Joseph Nye's framework, which includes daily communication, strategic messaging, and long-term relationship-building. The second part examines how IISMA works as educational diplomacy through Jane Knight's knowledge diplomacy theory from 2021 to 2023.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The author presents the conclusions drawn from the research, addressing all the research questions and summarizing the key findings discussed in the preceding

chapters. Additionally, the author offers suggestions and recommendations related to the research topic based on the study's outcomes.

CHAPTER II

INDONESIA'S EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMACY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS, NATIONAL APPROACH, AND THE ROLE OF IISMA

In today's interconnected global arena, education has evolved into a strategic instrument of diplomacy, complementing traditional political and economic tools (Knight 2022; Nye 2004). Countries increasingly recognise that international academic exchanges can cultivate mutual understanding, strengthen bilateral and multilateral relations, and enhance national soft power (de Wit 2020). For Indonesia, integrating education into its foreign policy reflects a dual ambition: to develop globally competent human capital and to project its cultural values, political ideals, and global identity to the international community (Kemendikbudristek 2023). Within this context, the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) stands as a flagship outbound mobility program designed not only to advance academic competencies but also to serve as a platform for public and educational diplomacy (Kristiana and Benito 2023). By applying Joseph Nye's soft power theory to explain why education matters diplomatically, and Jane Knight's knowledge diplomacy framework to analyse how such initiatives operate in practice, this chapter establishes the conceptual foundations and national approach underpinning IISMA's role in Indonesia's international engagement.

2.1 Education Diplomacy

Educational diplomacy is increasingly recognized as a strategic instrument for fostering international relations, enhancing national image, and promoting peaceful influence by disseminating values and culture (Knight 2008; Nye 2004). As Joseph Nye

(Nye 2004) posits in his theory of soft power, countries can achieve foreign policy objectives not only through coercion but also through attraction, where education plays a key role. Nye further highlights that the power of attraction through culture, values, and policies plays a more sustainable role in international relations than coercive measures. This highlights that today's diplomacy concerns governments engaging with one another and how societies and individuals project a country's image abroad (Nye 2008).

In the context of educational diplomacy, various countries have strategically used international student exchange programs to project soft power. For example, the Fulbright Program in the United States and the Confucius Institutes in China are prominent examples where education has been leveraged to enhance cultural influence and foster long-term international goodwill (Altbach and Knight 2007). These programs provide academic opportunities and create networks of influence by building positive perceptions of the sponsoring country among foreign citizens (Altbach and Knight 2007). Similarly, European countries have utilized the Erasmus+ program to promote intercultural understanding and European identity throughout the continent and beyond (European Commission 2020).

Indonesia has increasingly sought to leverage education in its public diplomacy efforts. Knight (Knight 2008) highlighted that internationalization involves integrating an intercultural dimension into post-secondary education, which Indonesia has pursued through various initiatives, including the Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) Scholarship, the Darmasiswa program, and, most recently, the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) (Kristiana and Benito 2023). According to Kristiana and Benito, programs such as IISMA act as educational and cultural diplomacy vehicles,

projecting a favourable image of Indonesia abroad while fostering mutual understanding and strengthening bilateral relations.

Dewi and Dewi (Dewi and Dewi 2025) emphasized that, through activities such as traditional performances, culinary showcases, and intercultural discussions, IISMA participants embody the role of informal ambassadors who introduce and promote Indonesia's diverse cultural identity to the global community. These informal exchanges often profoundly impact the foreign public, shaping their perceptions of Indonesia through personal encounters rather than official diplomatic channels (Dewi and Dewi 2025). This is consistent with Melissen's (Melissen 2005) notion that new public diplomacy places greater emphasis on non-state actors, such as students, NGOs, and educational institutions, in strengthening bilateral and multilateral relationships.

In addition, Ad Dawya and Okvitawanli argue that alumni of international mobility programs, such as IISMA, continue to act as cultural intermediaries long after their academic period ends, participating in ongoing international collaborations, engaging in cross-border initiatives, and contributing to Indonesia's global networks. This people-to-people diplomacy aligns with Cull's (Cull 2008) emphasis on the importance of long-term relationship building in public diplomacy, where trust and familiarity formed through educational exchanges can influence diplomatic relations for decades (Cull 2008).

Moreover, scholars such as Falk (Falk 2016) and MacDonald (MacDonald 2024) have emphasised that educational diplomacy can also enhance democratic values, global citizenship, and intercultural tolerance. Students who participate in international exchanges often return home with broader perspectives and greater openness to diversity,

which can positively influence domestic socio-political landscapes (Falk 2016; MacDonald 2024). This reflects the dual benefit of educational diplomacy: it strengthens both international ties and domestic development.

Hill and Shiraishi (Hill and Shiraishi 2007) note that as Indonesia seeks to establish itself more prominently in global arenas, education becomes a vital tool not only for human capital development, but also for projecting national values and fostering global goodwill. The Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has explicitly stated that programs like IISMA are designed to "equip students to become global citizens while promoting Indonesian values abroad" (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

However, challenges remain. As observed by Putri (Putri 2023) and Suharno (Suharno 2023), access to international education opportunities, such as IISMA, is often limited to students from privileged socio-economic backgrounds, raising questions about inclusivity and representativeness. Without deliberate policies to ensure equal access across regions and social strata, educational diplomacy risks becoming an elitist endeavour that does not fully reflect the diversity of the sending country (Putri 2023; Suharno 2023).

Additionally, there is often a lack of structured post-program engagement to sustain the diplomatic capital built during international exchanges. As noted by Salsabiilah (Salsabiilah 2022), the absence of systematic alumni integration into broader diplomatic or cultural initiatives can result in lost opportunities to harness the soft power potential of returning students. To address this, countries such as Japan and Germany have invested in robust alumni networks that continuously involve former exchange students in diplomatic,

cultural, and economic dialogues, an approach Indonesia could emulate (Salsabiilah 2022).

These scholarly insights collectively reinforce the notion that when strategically managed and integrated into foreign policy, education can be a powerful tool for enhancing national influence, projecting soft power, and fostering sustainable international partnerships (Knight 2008; Nye 2004; Melissen 2005). Indonesia's embrace of educational diplomacy through programs like IISMA demonstrates its commitment to positioning itself as an engaged and collaborative actor in the global community. By continuously improving these programs' inclusivity, sustainability, and diplomatic alignment, Indonesia can strengthen its position as a nation that values peace, mutual understanding, and global cooperation (Kemendikbudristek 2023; Kristiana and Benito 2023).

2.1.1 The Role of Education in Indonesia's Foreign Policy

Education has long been recognised as a crucial instrument in conducting international relations and projecting national interests. In Indonesia, education plays a central role in the country's foreign policy by serving as a vehicle for soft power, cultural diplomacy, and the promotion of national identity on the global stage (Nye 2004). Indonesia's foreign policy, guided by the constitutional mandate of "free and active" diplomacy (Buku Putih Politik Luar Negeri Indonesia 2015), emphasises the importance of engaging with other nations in a manner that respects sovereignty while actively contributing to international peace and cooperation. Education serves as a vital avenue through which Indonesia projects its values of

tolerance, pluralism, and democracy, all of which are deeply embedded in the national ideology of Pancasila (Sukma 2009).

Before the establishment of large-scale funding bodies such as the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP) in 2012, Indonesia had already implemented various scholarship schemes to support both outbound mobility of its citizens and inbound mobility of foreign students. In the 1950s–1980s, participation in the *Colombo Plan* enabled Indonesian government officials, lecturers, and professionals to pursue training and higher education abroad, strengthening technical, scientific, and educational capacities (Hill and Thee 1998). The Directorate General of Higher Education also ran the *Overseas Fellowship Program* (1970s–1990s) to improve the qualifications of university lecturers and researchers through postgraduate studies overseas.

Inbound mobility initiatives were developed in parallel as instruments of cultural diplomacy. The *Darmasiswa Scholarship*, launched in 1974, aimed to attract foreign students to study the Indonesian language, arts, and culture, thereby fostering mutual understanding and goodwill (Nugroho 2018). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs later introduced the *Beasiswa Seni dan Budaya Indonesia* (BSBI) in 2003, targeting young foreign professionals and students for short-term cultural immersion programmes (Kemenlu 2020).

In the 2000s, outbound scholarship opportunities expanded with the introduction of *Beasiswa Unggulan* (2006), which supports high-achieving Indonesian students and professionals for study at home or abroad (Kemendikbud

2021). Regional cooperation frameworks also began to play a role; the *ASEAN International Mobility for Students* (AIMS) programme, launched in 2010, promotes regional academic mobility and intercultural understanding among ASEAN member countries (ASEAN Secretariat 2019). The establishment of *LPDP* in 2012 marked a significant milestone in Indonesia's outbound scholarship policy. Managed by the Ministry of Finance, LPDP funds master's and doctoral studies for Indonesian citizens at top domestic and international universities in alignment with national development priorities (LPDP 2023).

One of the key ways education contributes to Indonesia's foreign policy is by cultivating people-to-people connections. The exchange of students, academics, and researchers fosters mutual understanding, reduces stereotypes, and lays the groundwork for long-term diplomatic relationships (Knight 2022). For instance, Indonesia's participation in international educational programs, such as AIMS and the *Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards* (IISMA), exemplifies how education serves as a bridge for cross-cultural dialogue and the enhancement of soft power (Kemendikbudristek 2023). Educational diplomacy also allows Indonesia to position itself as a responsible global actor. Through scholarship programs such as BSBI and Darmasiswa, Indonesia invites foreign students to study the country's language, arts, and culture. These programs promote Indonesian traditions and create lasting bonds between foreign participants and the government (Nugroho 2018).

Furthermore, Indonesia leverages its educational engagement to support regional stability and development. As a member of ASEAN, Indonesia has been at

the forefront of academic cooperation in Southeast Asia. Initiatives such as the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) reflect Indonesia's commitment to regional educational development as a pathway to peace and shared prosperity (SEAMEO 2020). In the broader Indo-Pacific strategy, education is crucial in fostering strategic partnerships. Indonesia's educational collaborations with countries such as Australia, Japan, South Korea, and members of the European Union help deepen political, economic, and security ties (Rüland 2019). By sending Indonesian students abroad and hosting foreign scholars, Indonesia benefits from knowledge transfer and strengthens diplomatic goodwill.

Additionally, the rise of global challenges, such as climate change, digital transformation, and public health crises, underscores the need for educational diplomacy. Through academic collaboration and joint research initiatives, Indonesia engages with global partners to address these pressing issues, reinforcing its role as a constructive international stakeholder (Perwita and Yani 2005). Education also contributes to Indonesia's foreign policy by enhancing its global reputation. According to the *Global Soft Power Index* (Brand Finance 2023), educational excellence and cultural exchange are key pillars of soft power. Indonesia enhances its attractiveness as a collaborative and open society by promoting higher education standards, international mobility, and academic partnerships.

The Indonesian government, particularly through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, has increasingly integrated internationalisation into its higher education agenda. The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy reflects this shift by encouraging students to gain

international exposure and global competencies (Kemendikbud 2020). Moreover, education diplomacy is strategically used to support Indonesia's economic diplomacy. By nurturing a globally competent workforce, fostering innovation, and attracting foreign investment through academic cooperation, education makes a direct contribution to national development and competitiveness (World Bank 2021).

Indonesia has also increasingly used education as part of its public diplomacy efforts to influence international perceptions. The government builds soft power capacity through Indonesian language centres abroad, participation in UNESCO education programs, and promoting Indonesia as a destination for international study (Nye 2008). For instance, Indonesia's active engagement with UNESCO's *Global Citizenship Education* (GCED) framework positions the country as a regional leader in education for sustainable development and peacebuilding (UNESCO 2020). In addition, integrating digital education diplomacy has emerged as a new frontier. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Indonesia expanded its use of digital platforms for international education cooperation, including virtual student exchanges, webinars, and joint online courses, thus continuing educational engagement despite mobility restrictions (Kemendikbud 2021).

Furthermore, the alumni networks of Indonesian scholarship programs, such as IISMA, Darmasiswa, LPDP, and BSBI, serve as long-term diplomatic assets. Having experienced Indonesian culture firsthand, these individuals often become informal ambassadors who continue to promote Indonesia and foster bilateral ties well after completing their studies (Knight 2022). As Indonesia aspires

to become a stronger player in the ASEAN and global context, the government has recognised the need to integrate education into its broader foreign policy strategies, including its vision for the “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Indonesia 2019). This approach highlights the importance of building educational linkages to complement economic and political cooperation. To support this vision, Indonesia has increased investment in the internationalisation of its universities through capacity-building programs, promoting Indonesian research excellence, and attracting international students, thereby reinforcing its role as an educational hub in the region (World Bank 2021).

Table 1. Indonesian Scholarship Programmes: Goals and Target Audiences

No.	Program	Year Launched	Goals	Target Audience
1.	Colombo Plan	1950s	Build human resource capacity in technical, scientific, and educational fields	Indonesian officials, lecturers, professionals
2.	Overseas Fellowship Program	1970s	Upgrade qualifications of lecturers/researchers through overseas postgraduate study	Indonesian university lecturers & researchers
3.	Darmasiswa Scholarship	1974	Promote Indonesian language, arts, and culture internationally	Foreign students from partner countries
4.	Beasiswa Seni dan Budaya Indonesia (BSBI)	2003	Enhance cultural diplomacy through immersive arts and culture training	Young foreign professionals & students
5.	Beasiswa Unggulan	2006	Support outstanding Indonesians for domestic/overseas study	High-achieving Indonesian students &

No.	Program	Year Launched	Goals	Target Audience
				professionals
6.	ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS)	2010	Promote regional academic mobility within ASEAN	Undergraduate students from ASEAN member countries
7.	Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP)	2012	Fund master's & doctoral studies for national development	Indonesian postgraduate students
8.	Indonesia International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA)	2021	Enhance global competence & promote Indonesian culture abroad	Indonesian undergraduate students

Sources: AIMS-SEAMEO RIHED 2019, Darmasiswa Scholarship 2020, Kemenlu 2020

Kemendikbudristek 2021, World Bank 2021, LPDP 2022

2.2 IISMA Program

The Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) is one of the flagship outbound mobility programs launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) of Indonesia in 2021 as part of the Merdeka Belajar – Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy framework (Kemendikbudristek 2023). The program offers scholarships for Indonesian undergraduate students to study abroad for one semester at top-ranked partner universities worldwide. IISMA is a strategic innovation in Indonesia's higher education system aimed at enhancing students' global competence while simultaneously serving as an instrument of educational diplomacy (Kristiana & Benito 2023).

The establishment of IISMA marks a significant shift in Indonesia's approach to internationalising education. While previous efforts focused on inbound mobility, such as hosting foreign students through the Darmasiswa or Bahasa Indonesia Penutur Asing (BIPA) programs (Dewi & Dewi 2025), IISMA embraces outbound mobility, enabling Indonesian students to immerse themselves in foreign academic and cultural environments. The program is designed to strengthen educational excellence and promote Indonesian identity and culture in the international arena through the active engagement of students abroad (Ad Dawya & Okvitawanli 2024).

The design of IISMA reflects a deliberate effort to link educational policy with foreign policy objectives. By selecting host universities in strategic partner countries across Asia, Europe, North America, and Oceania, IISMA supports Indonesia's diplomatic aspirations to expand its influence and visibility on the global stage (Kemlu RI 2022). Students are expected to participate in academic courses outside their major disciplines, explore global perspectives, and engage with international peers through educational and cultural activities (Knight 2008). In doing so, they gain academic enrichment and function as informal ambassadors who project Indonesia's image abroad (Nye 2004).

One of the distinguishing features of IISMA is its holistic approach to student development and diplomacy. Awardees must participate in cultural promotion events, student associations, volunteering programs, and international forums abroad (Kemendikbudristek 2023). These non-academic activities are integral to the program's diplomatic value. For instance, Indonesian students have participated in cultural festivals, food exhibitions, and student leadership events where they introduced Indonesian cuisine, traditional dances, batik, and national music (Dewi & Dewi 2025). Such activities

strengthen people-to-people diplomacy and enhance Indonesia's soft power through interpersonal engagement (Melissen 2005).

From the perspective of educational diplomacy, IISMA operationalises the concept of soft power as articulated by Joseph Nye (Nye 2004). Through their participation in international academic environments, Indonesian students foster mutual understanding and build positive perceptions of Indonesia among their foreign peers and professors (Nye 2008). Rather than relying on formal diplomatic channels, IISMA leverages the social capital of students to construct long-term, non-coercive relationships with global communities. These interactions align with Nye's assertion that soft power derives from a country's ability to attract rather than coerce, particularly through its culture, values, and policies.

The program also aligns with the theoretical framework of internationalisation in higher education proposed by Jane Knight (Knight 2008), who views internationalisation as the intentional process of integrating international, intercultural, or global dimensions into the functions of postsecondary education. IISMA reflects this integration by enabling students to experience international learning environments, engage in cross-cultural dialogues, and bring back global insights to their home institutions. Moreover, by developing partnerships with top universities worldwide, IISMA contributes to institutional-level internationalisation, which can lead to collaborative research, joint programs, and academic exchange (Knight 2022). Between 2021 and 2023, IISMA has shown significant growth in reach and participation. According to official data from Kemendikbudristek (Kemendikbudristek 2023), over 4,500 students have participated in the program. The following table illustrates the annual growth in applicants and awardees

from 2021 to 2023, highlighting the increasing interest and institutional expansion of the IISMA program over time.

Table 2. Number of Applicants and Awardees of the IISMA Program (2021–2023)

Year	Applicants	Awardees
2021	2,551 Undergraduate	1,000
2022	11,028 = 7,522 Undergraduate & 3,506 Vocation	1,565
2023	9,170 = 7,714 Undergraduate & 1,456 Vocation	1,984
Total	22,749 Applicants	4,549 Awardees

Sources: Kemendikbudristek, IISMA Official Website

The awardees attended more than 100 partner universities in countries spread across continents, Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania, such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Hungary, Italy, Malaysia, and the Netherlands. The selection process is highly competitive, involving academic transcripts, English language proficiency, motivation letters, interviews, and letters of recommendation, ensuring that the selected awardees represent Indonesia's academic excellence and cultural richness (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

Beyond the experience abroad, IISMA has also established a post-program alumni network called the IISMA Alumni Club (IAC). This network is a platform for former awardees to continue their contributions to educational diplomacy (Ad Dawya & Okvitawanli 2024). The alumni serve as long-term agents of Indonesia's international engagement through events such as IISMA Global Dialogues, school outreach, and collaborations with Indonesian embassies. The alumni network also strengthens

connections between Indonesia and its global partners, reinforcing the sustainability and continuity of the program's diplomatic outcomes (Dewi & Dewi 2025).

Furthermore, the institutional partnerships fostered through IISMA play a crucial role in the long-term internationalisation strategy of Indonesian higher education. Partner universities benefit from the diversity and perspective of Indonesian students, while Indonesian institutions gain visibility and potential for future cooperation (Knight 2022). These partnerships often extend beyond student exchange to include collaborative research, academic seminars, and policy dialogues, thus creating a broader impact on global academic relations (Hill & Shiraishi 2007).

The success of IISMA also lies in its alignment with Indonesia's broader vision of becoming a more globally competitive nation. In his official remarks, Minister Nadiem Makarim emphasized that programs like IISMA are crucial for increasing Indonesia's global exposure and ensuring that Indonesian students are not merely followers, but also contributors to worldwide innovation and discourse (Kemendikbudristek 2023). IISMA, therefore, plays a dual role: it builds individual student capacity while strengthening national identity and influence through education (Kristiana & Benito 2023).

Despite its achievements, IISMA faces several challenges. These include limited capacity relative to student demand, disparities in access to information among students in different regions, and the need for better pre-departure training in diplomacy and intercultural communication (Putri 2023). Addressing these challenges is essential to ensure the program remains inclusive, impactful, and aligned with Indonesia's foreign policy goals. Efforts such as decentralizing recruitment outreach, increasing funding, and

enhancing cultural orientation modules have been proposed to further the program's outcomes (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

IISMA represents a significant milestone in Indonesia's integration of education into its foreign policy framework. By positioning students as the core actors of cultural diplomacy, IISMA enhances Indonesia's international visibility, promotes mutual understanding, and builds strategic relationships with academic institutions worldwide (Nye 2004; Knight 2008; Kristiana & Benito 2023). The program embodies the synergy between educational advancement and soft power projection, making it a cornerstone of Indonesia's educational diplomacy in the 21st century.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EDUCATIONAL DIPLOMACY IN THE IISMA PROGRAM 2021-2023

Building on the conceptual and contextual foundations outlined in the previous chapter, this chapter analyses the implementation of Indonesia's educational diplomacy through the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) during the period 2021–2023. While Chapter II examined the historical evolution of Indonesia's scholarship programmes and the role of IISMA as an instrument of soft power, this chapter applies two analytical lenses, Joseph Nye's soft power theory to explain *why* education matters diplomatically, and Jane Knight's knowledge diplomacy framework to illustrate *how* it functions in practice. The analysis integrates qualitative findings, official policy documents, and secondary literature to evaluate IISMA's contribution to Indonesia's global positioning, its capacity to foster intercultural understanding, and its potential as a long-term diplomatic asset. By combining these perspectives, this chapter aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of the strategic value and practical effectiveness of IISMA in advancing Indonesia's foreign policy objectives (Nye 2004; Knight 2022; Kemendikbudristek 2023).

3.1 Positioning IISMA as Soft Power and Public Diplomacy (Nye)

In recent decades, diplomacy has undergone a profound transformation. Rather than relying solely on coercive tools such as military alliances or economic sanctions, nations increasingly turn to soft instruments, such as education, culture, and values, to project influence and win hearts abroad. This strategic shift aligns closely with Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which he defines as the "ability to affect others to obtain the

outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment” (Nye 2004). In this context, international education emerges as a key site of engagement. When students cross borders, they consume knowledge and communicate their national identity, culture, and values. This chapter explores the diplomatic function of education through Nye’s soft power theory. It analyzes how the Indonesian government, through programs like IISMA, leverages education to build influence and long-term international relationships.

Soft power derives from a country’s culture, political values, and foreign policy when they are seen as legitimate or morally attractive (Nye 2004). Unlike hard power, which compels through force or inducement, soft power operates subtly through persuasion and appeal. Education plays a central role in this process, particularly in international exchange. When foreign students experience a country’s education system or interact with its citizens abroad, they gain impressions that shape their perception of that nation’s credibility, openness, and values.

In the Indonesian context, the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program exemplifies this logic. Launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in 2021, IISMA sends undergraduate students to top global universities for a semester of non-degree study. Though the program’s stated aim is academic, it carries implicit diplomatic benefits by placing Indonesian students as cultural representatives in foreign academic and social environments (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

According to Nye, soft power is exercised through three main mechanisms: daily communication, strategic messaging, and long-term relationship-building. These are not

theoretical abstractions; they appear concretely in educational programs encouraging interpersonal connection, national branding, and sustained institutional partnerships.

3.1.1 Daily Communication: Promoting Indonesia's Image

As Joseph Nye (Nye 2004) explains, *daily communication* involves the routine, unscripted exchanges between individuals through which a nation's culture, values, and identity are conveyed in subtle but powerful ways. In the realm of soft power, these interactions are often more persuasive than formal diplomacy because they are perceived as authentic, voluntary, and credible. Jane Knight (2022) adds that in the context of knowledge diplomacy, such exchanges are not incidental, they actively contribute to building trust, fostering intercultural understanding, and strengthening international partnerships.

In the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), daily communication plays a pivotal role in promoting Indonesia's image abroad. Awardees' interactions with foreign peers, faculty, and communities create first-hand impressions of Indonesia as a nation that is pluralistic, culturally rich, and open to collaboration. This people-to-people engagement, whether through cultural sharing, academic participation, or community service, serves as an informal yet highly impactful form of public diplomacy.

1. IISMA awardee Zahra Nur Afiifah, from UGM's Department of Development Geography, described her academic and cultural engagement at her host institution:

“During the fall 2023 semester at Universitat Pompeu Fabra, I took courses on Global Culture, Ethics in Globalization, and participated in field studies in historic Barcelona... beyond the classroom, I collaborated with Esperança to prepare and distribute food as part of the Batik Challenge to promote Indonesian culture.”
(UGM Faculty of Geography 2024)

This example shows how Zahra actively weaves Indonesia’s cultural identity into her daily academic and community interactions. According to Nye (Nye 2008), such grassroots cultural initiatives allow soft power to flourish through authentic, experience-based attraction, as opposed to formal diplomacy. Meanwhile, Knight’s knowledge diplomacy perspective highlights that these cross-cultural activities build deeper intercultural trust and awareness, repositioning Indonesian students as cultural connectors and enriching host communities' perceptions of Indonesia.

2. Anya Arqia, an IISMA 2021 awardee at Lancaster University, highlighted her observations of daily intercultural interactions on campus:

“In England, especially the northern part such as Lancaster, the culture of politeness, apologizing, and saying thank you is very strong, the culture of appreciating every opinion and point of view is deeply rooted.”
(Anya Arqia 2022)

Although the statement reflects her observation of British culture, it also demonstrates reciprocal cultural learning, where Indonesian students not only introduce their heritage but also internalize values from their host environment. By navigating these daily interactions, Anya implicitly promoted

Indonesian values of humility and mutual respect, showing Indonesia's ability to engage constructively with foreign cultures. In Nye's framework, this represents soft power at its most subtle, credibility built through lived, everyday experiences. From Knight's perspective, such immersion generates knowledge diplomacy by cultivating cross-cultural sensitivity and building long-term intercultural trust.

3. Ria Verensia, an IISMA 2021 awardee from Universitas Gadjah Mada studying at the University of Waterloo, recounts her cultural outreach on campus:

“At Waterloo, I lived in a dorm that enabled me to connect with locals and learn about their culture. To introduce Indonesian culture, I participated in a Youth Pledge commemoration organized by IISMA students, which included cultural performances, bulletins, games, and food.”
(Ria Verensia 2021)

Her experience exemplifies how student-led cultural events serve as daily acts of diplomacy, informal yet impactful engagements that elevate Indonesia's image through authentic interpersonal exchange. In Joseph Nye's (Nye 2008) terms, these activities reflect the essence of soft power: attraction generated through cultural authenticity rather than state-directed persuasion. Meanwhile, Jane Knight's (Knight 2022) knowledge diplomacy framework underscores the value of such efforts in building long-term relational and intercultural capital, where trust and identity are cultivated through everyday, meaningful participation.

These examples demonstrate that IISMA awardees function as cultural translators in everyday settings through religious immersion, academic reflection, or community engagement. Their authentic, daily interactions introduce nuanced perspectives on Indonesia's pluralism, openness, and environmental values. According to Nye (Nye 2008), such credibility and authenticity often yield greater diplomatic impact than formal channels of state communication.

Digital storytelling further magnifies this impact. IISMA participants actively share their overseas experiences, stories about cooking, cultural exploration, and student life via Instagram, TikTok, and blogs. This networked storytelling enhances Indonesia's international image by showcasing lived experiences rather than official narratives (Cull 2008; Seib 2009).

Despite these strengths, some awardees have highlighted a lack of formal preparation for these roles. Interviews indicate they often felt uneasy addressing cultural sensitivities or framing their identity narratively during daily interactions (Dewi and Dewi 2025). Knight (Knight 2022) argues that effective educational diplomacy requires participants to understand and embrace their roles as "cultural envoys," not only as exchange students.

3.1.2 Strategic Messaging: Constructing the Narrative of Indonesia as a Global Partner

Strategic messaging, as outlined in Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, involves the deliberate crafting and dissemination of coherent narratives that enhance a country's appeal abroad (Nye 2008). While daily communication unfolds informally through interpersonal interactions, strategic messaging is intentionally

orchestrated by governments and institutions to project a specific national image. IISMA serves this purpose by aligning its branding, official communications, and student activities to shape Indonesia's global identity.

The program's tagline, *"Empowering Talents, Building the Nation"*, underscores Indonesia's agenda of transforming student mobility into a national-strengthening initiative (Kemdikbudristek 2022). Minister Nadiem Makarim emphasized this during a 2023 statement:

"IISMA is not merely a student exchange program but a strategic investment in education diplomacy. Our students are the face of Indonesia in the International arena."

(Kemdikbudristek 2023).

These messages collectively frame Indonesia as a nation that invests in global-ready youth and embraces international cooperation.

1. The first example of IISMA's strategic messaging appeared in 2021 at Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF) in Barcelona, Spain. Indonesian IISMA students organized an "Un Día con Indonesia" event to commemorate Indonesia's Youth Pledge Day. The event featured traditional dance, angklung performances, Indonesian food, and an introduction to cultural heritage through posters and narrative presentations. As stated by one of the participants during the event,

"Through this event, we want to tell the world how beautiful Indonesia is, and how proud we are of our culture" (IISMA UPF 2021).

The statement illustrates the students' conscious effort to frame their national identity in a compelling and emotionally resonant way, an essential principle of effective soft power, according to Nye (Nye 2008). The event took place in an open academic setting, enabling interaction with the local university community, and it was recorded and published on YouTube, extending its diplomatic reach to global audiences.

On Youth Pledge Day, the event's timing also infused the message with national symbolism, reinforcing Indonesia's long-standing narrative of youth-led unity and pluralism. This activity exemplifies strategic messaging that combines emotional storytelling, institutional legitimacy, and digital visibility. The students' initiative aligned organically with Indonesia's broader soft power goals: to project the country as culturally rich, cohesive, and outward-looking through youth engagement abroad.

2. Second, in 2022, IISMA awardees at the University of Waterloo demonstrated strategic messaging by leveraging campus platforms to actively share Indonesia's cultural heritage. One notable event, *Kesatria: The Lost Heritage*, was organized at the Student Life Centre to foster community-building and cultural exchange through interactive displays, traditional games, Indonesian food, photo booths, and souvenirs. As reported by Waterloo International, IISMA students curated the event to help campus members "learn more about Indonesian culture" (Waterloo International 2022). This initiative exemplifies strategic messaging: by embedding national identity in accessible, immersive experiences, students

introduced positive narratives of Indonesia, pluralistic, creative, and hospitable. According to Joseph Nye's *attraction-based influence*, soft power is about being attractive and credible rather than coercive. Here, IISMA participants functioned as authentic cultural ambassadors, translating Indonesia's values into meaningful visitor experiences. They did not merely message; they embodied the message. This approach amplifies Indonesia's image abroad by combining cultural symbolism, emotional resonance, and grassroots trust, all essential components of effective strategic messaging.

3. In June 2023, the Government of New Zealand formally welcomed 66 IISMA awardees at an event hosted by their Embassy in Jakarta. Deputy Ambassador Giselle Larcombe highlighted Indonesia's growing partnership:

“She warmly expressed appreciation of the bilateral educational relationship with Indonesia, particularly the collaboration with Kemendikbudristek and LPDP. She also voiced optimism that the IISMA program would help further strengthen the partnership between both countries”.
(Giselle Larcombe, paraphrased from Kemendikbudristek 2023)

This official recognition turns IISMA into a strategic communication tool, framing Indonesia as a proactive and valued global partner in education. From Joseph Nye's soft power theory, such institutional-level praise boosts Indonesia's attractiveness and legitimacy by emphasizing collaborative intent and shared values. Within Jane

Knight's framework of knowledge diplomacy, this gesture transcends student mobility; it reflects purposeful diplomacy through educational cooperation, embedding Indonesia in long-term academic and cultural networks.

Together, these examples demonstrate that IISMA's value lies in sending students abroad and in projecting a consistent national narrative through them. When Indonesia's youth align their values and actions with national messaging, especially within supportive institutional environments, public diplomacy becomes more credible, distributed, and sustainable. Strategic messaging, in this sense, is not a one-time broadcast but an evolving set of interactions, events, and impressions.

Digital platforms also significantly amplify these messages. IISMA participants regularly share their cultural experiences and reflections through social media, video content, and blogs. Social media initiatives led by IISMA participants and the program's official channels portray Indonesian students as confident global learners actively participating in academic, cultural, and social exchanges. These digital narratives help broaden the reach of Indonesia's soft power by speaking directly to international youth and enhancing the visibility of Indonesia as an open, democratic, and collaborative nation.

Through these primary channels, governmental narrative, awardee-driven engagement, and social media amplification, IISMA's strategic messaging constructs a consistent and attractive image of Indonesia as a modern, diverse, and forward-looking nation. In line with Nye's theory, the most effective international

messaging is not coercive propaganda but authentic representation, delivered by trusted messengers in real and meaningful contexts.

3.1.3 Long-Term Relationship-Building: Sustaining Influence Beyond the Scholarship

In Joseph Nye’s soft power framework, long-term relationship building represents the most sustainable and meaningful influence. Unlike daily communication or strategic messaging, long-term engagement focuses on forging durable connections rooted in trust, shared values, and repeated interaction (Nye 2008). Within the IISMA framework, this is manifested in cultivating alumni networks, institutional cooperation, and the enduring personal commitment of awardees to international collaboration. Jane Knight (Knight 2022) describes this as *knowledge diplomacy*, the strategic use of global education to foster peaceful and long-term relations through mutual learning and co-created knowledge.

1. IISMA Alumni Club

One of the most formalized mechanisms for sustaining IISMA’s impact is the IISMA Alumni Club (IAC), officially launched in 2022 under the guidance of the Directorate General of Higher Education. More than just a social group, the IAC functions as a structured platform for post-program engagement, alumni representation, and national soft power reinforcement. Through activities such as the IISMA Impact Forum, mentorship for future cohorts, and “IISMA Goes to School” roadshows, the club actively connects former awardees with international education stakeholders and broader civil society.

The establishment of the IISMA Alumni Club (IISMA-AC) has marked a significant step in ensuring that the impact of Indonesia's educational diplomacy extends beyond the period of student mobility. One illustrative example is the "ALUMNITE: Nostalgia, Unity, and Celebration" event held in 2023. Organized by IISMA-AC, this hybrid gathering brought together alumni, prospective students, and stakeholders in a series of activities including panel discussions, alumni showcases, recognition awards, and the inauguration of a new alumni committee (Universitas Tidar 2023). Far from being a mere reunion, the event functioned as a platform for professional networking, knowledge exchange, and the cultivation of a collective identity among IISMA alumni.

From the perspective of Joseph Nye's soft power, ALUMNITE demonstrates how informal yet structured alumni engagement can contribute to shaping Indonesia's global image. Alumni who have studied abroad act as credible messengers of Indonesia's openness, creativity, and competence, projecting narratives that are both authentic and attractive. The panel discussions, covering themes such as the intersection of education, work, and social change, portrayed Indonesian alumni as globally minded yet locally rooted individuals, reinforcing the perception of Indonesia as a country invested in knowledge, innovation, and cross-cultural understanding.

2. Awardees

The personal efforts of IISMA alumni often evolve into long-term contributions to Indonesia's international image.

- a. A notable example is an awardee from the University of Pennsylvania (Penn 2022) in 2022 who initiated a connection between their host professor and a faculty member at Universitas Indonesia. This led to a joint virtual lecture on Southeast Asian political thought, followed by a collaborative article proposal. Although the program officially ended, the relationship persisted into academic year 2023, transforming a one-semester exchange into an academic dialogue platform.
- b. Another significant case of sustained engagement comes from Wulan Rianti, an IISMA 2022 awardee from Politeknik Negeri Jakarta who studied at Coventry University, United Kingdom. Following her IISMA semester, she was accepted into Coventry's Master's by Research program, at the same university, with partial support and recommendation from faculty members she had previously worked with during her exchange. In an interview, Wulan said:

“I built a great academic relationship with my professors during IISMA. That connection was one of the reasons I was confident to apply for a research-based master's at Coventry. I didn't start from zero.”

(Wulan Rianti, quoted in Liputan6 2024)

Her story demonstrates how IISMA functions as a launchpad for deeper academic integration, not merely as a mobility experience. The continued engagement between students and host faculty after the program embodies Joseph Nye's notion of earned influence, power that is voluntarily given through trust and familiarity, rather than coercion or economic incentives (Nye 2008). It also exemplifies Knight's concept

of knowledge diplomacy; wherein long-term academic collaboration is rooted in shared scholarly goals and mutual intellectual respect (Knight 2022). This case reaffirms the Indonesian government's broader ambition to create "globally-minded citizens" through international education, while also strengthening institutional links between Indonesia and global research universities.

- c. The example of Nabila Syifa Nuraini, an IISMA 2022 awardee at the University of Groningen, illustrates how alumni have also taken on the role of influencers in promoting IISMA and guiding future participants. After returning from her program, Nabila conducted a seminar titled *"Strategy: How to Get the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards"* at Universitas AMIKOM Yogyakarta in September 2022. In this workshop, she shared practical strategies for writing motivation letters, preparing applications, and adapting to international academic environments:

Her initiative shows that awardees are not only passive beneficiaries but also knowledge multipliers who extend the reach of the program domestically. From Nye's (Nye 2004) perspective, such efforts demonstrate the persuasive quality of soft power through credibility and relatability, as peers are often more influenced by alumni who have lived the experience than by official institutional campaigns. From Knight's (Knight 2022) knowledge diplomacy framework, the seminar represents a concrete example of how alumni function as

“knowledge diplomats”, individuals who transmit program values, expand awareness, and empower the next generation to take part in academic mobility, thereby sustaining IISMA as a long-term diplomatic instrument.

- d. Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) has demonstrated a strong commitment to fostering long-term relationship-building with IISMA alumni as part of its broader strategy for sustaining international engagement. A notable example is Ahmad Priyansyah, an IISMA 2021 alumnus from the University of Sussex, who was invited as a speaker at the *IISMA 2022 Talkshow* hosted by UII. The event, attended by hundreds of participants and organized in collaboration with several universities, including UKDW, UPY, and Undhira, also featured IISMA committee representatives and fellow alumni. Ahmad’s participation highlighted how former awardees continue to contribute to their home institutions after completing their studies abroad, bridging experiences between past cohorts and new awardees.

By sharing his personal journey and offering practical advice, such as emphasizing honesty and authenticity during the IISMA interview process, Ahmad’s role went beyond simple knowledge transfer. He provided mentorship, encouragement, and inspiration for aspiring participants, embodying the values of resilience and openness that IISMA seeks to cultivate. At the institutional level, his involvement reinforced UII’s international network while enriching its academic

community with first-hand global insights. Collectively, this reflects the long-term strategy of leveraging alumni as mentors, ambassadors, and knowledge brokers, ensuring that the impact of IISMA extends beyond a one-semester exchange and contributes to the sustainable growth of Indonesia's educational diplomacy.

- e. A strong illustration of long-term relationship-building at Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII) is the active engagement of Nani Septianie, an IISMA 2021 awardee at the University of Warsaw, who became a speaker in UII's talkshow "*Pengalaman hingga Tantangan Belajar di Luar Negeri.*" Organized by UII's Directorate of Partnerships/International Office, the event invited alumni to reflect on their journeys abroad while guiding prospective participants. Nani shared her academic experiences in Poland, emphasizing how initial challenges became opportunities for growth. She explained how strict discipline, such as preparing lecture readings in advance and revising feedback carefully before assignments, helped her adapt to different academic standards and develop transferable skills that benefited her long after the program.

Beyond academics, Nani also highlighted the cultural adjustments and resilience needed to thrive in a new environment. From navigating Poland's colder climate to building a support system through the Indonesian Student Association (PPI), she demonstrated how awardees create coping mechanisms that reinforce independence and

intercultural adaptability. By sharing these insights with younger cohorts, Nani not only inspired students to pursue IISMA but also contributed to UII's long-term strategy of alumni engagement. Her role illustrates how awardees serve as bridges between global experiences and local institutional growth, ensuring that IISMA continues to generate lasting impact on Indonesia's educational diplomacy.

Such expressions reflect how alumni internalize their role as informal diplomats and soft power agents. The depth of these relationships, fostered through academic credibility, emotional connection, and ongoing trust, shows how individual IISMA participants can shape long-term international perceptions of Indonesia, far beyond the program itself.

3. Institutions

Beyond individuals and alumni groups, IISMA catalyzes long-term cooperation between Indonesian universities and foreign institutions. These relationships often begin informally through faculty interaction or joint event coordination and may develop into memoranda of understanding (MoUs), research partnerships, or recurring academic exchanges.

A structural example of long-term academic impact can be seen at Leiden University, where interactions with IISMA awardees and Indonesian diplomatic representatives contributed to launching a new course titled "Contemporary Indonesia" in 2023. The course was designed to deepen understanding of Indonesian politics, society, and culture, and was integrated into Leiden's

Southeast Asian studies track. As part of its implementation, the university invited IISMA alumni as guest speakers, enriching the curriculum with authentic local perspectives and enhancing student engagement with real-world Indonesian experiences (Universiteit Leiden 2025). By embedding Indonesian knowledge into their curriculum, Leiden University acknowledged the relevance of Indonesian scholarship and institutionalized academic interest in the country, thereby strengthening bilateral educational diplomacy through curriculum innovation.

In addition, long-term academic relations are strengthened in the ongoing collaboration with partner universities such as the University of Missouri-Kansas City (UMKC). Since 2022, UMKC has hosted IISMA students for semester-based mobility and engaged in joint curriculum development and collaborative research initiatives (Habibah and Antara 2024). This indicates that long-term partnerships are not solely the result of formal MoUs but can grow organically from direct engagement and the positive impressions left by Indonesian students.

This aligns closely with Knight's (Knight 2022) emphasis on co-created internationalization, where institutions are not merely hosts or senders, but equal partners in building mutual understanding. Nye (Nye 2004) also emphasizes that enduring relationships are sustained through credible, multi-actor collaborations, which is precisely what IISMA fosters between Indonesian institutions, embassies, and foreign universities.

While the long-term engagements fostered through alumni, institutions, and community efforts highlight the diplomatic potential of IISMA, a deeper evaluation of its scale and structural support is necessary. With approximately 3,000–4,500 participants from 2021 to 2023, questions arise about whether this number is substantial enough to produce broad-based soft power outcomes. While IISMA's scale is modest compared to global benchmarks, assessing its relative size in Indonesia's outbound scholarship ecosystem is also important. For instance, programs like Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) send thousands of students abroad annually but do not prioritize cultural engagement, and Beasiswa Seni dan Budaya Indonesia (BSBI) focuses on inbound participants. In that regard, IISMA already stands out as one of the few programs explicitly designed to project Indonesia's image internationally through student mobility.

Furthermore, IISMA's administration is heavily concentrated under the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), raising concerns about the extent of coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other stakeholders involved in public diplomacy. The lack of visible inter-ministerial synergy limits the integration of IISMA into a comprehensive foreign policy strategy. Unlike programs in other countries where education and diplomacy ministries work in tandem, Indonesia's approach risks fragmenting educational diplomacy into isolated efforts.

For IISMA to fully realize its role as a soft power tool, greater alignment with Indonesia's diplomatic apparatus is essential. Establishing formal mechanisms for inter-ministerial collaboration, engaging embassies in host countries more directly, and embedding IISMA into broader bilateral cultural frameworks could elevate its strategic

impact. Only with such reforms can IISMA transition from an innovative academic initiative to a sustainable pillar of Indonesia's public diplomacy architecture.

3.2 Understanding IISMA as Knowledge Diplomacy (Knight)

In today's globalized diplomatic landscape, education is no longer confined to national development; it has become a key instrument for fostering international engagement and mutual understanding. Jane Knight (Knight 2022) conceptualizes this shift as *knowledge diplomacy*, which refers to the strategic use of international academic collaboration to build trust, reciprocity, and long-term partnerships. The Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), launched by Kemendikbudristek, exemplifies this emerging model. While primarily academic, IISMA also serves as a platform for cultural outreach and informal diplomacy through awardees' engagement with global communities.

To analyze IISMA's contribution to education diplomacy, this chapter applies Jane Knight's five-dimensional framework: intention and rationales, actions and partners, principles and values, modes and approaches, and activities and instruments. Together, these dimensions help reveal how IISMA transcends traditional educational exchange to function as a diplomatic tool in diverse national and institutional contexts.

3.2.1 Intention & Rationales

In Jane Knight's (Knight 2022) framework, *intentions* refer to the strategic, long-term goals of international education, such as building political ties or enhancing national reputation, while *rationales* are the immediate, practical

justifications for launching a program, including human capital development or cultural promotion. She emphasizes that true knowledge diplomacy moves beyond student mobility toward trust-building, reciprocity, and co-created knowledge.

In this light, the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) reflect both dimensions. The Indonesian government intends to use education as a diplomatic tool to increase Indonesia's global visibility. Concurrently, its rationale lies in internationalizing higher education and projecting national identity through soft power. As Kemendikbudristek (Kemendikbudristek 2023) states, IISMA aims to

“Equip students to become global citizens while promoting Indonesian values abroad.”

(Kemendikbudristek 2023)

This dual ambition of personal growth and national representation anchors IISMA firmly within Indonesia's broader foreign policy vision.

The rationale behind IISMA aligns with Indonesia's dual objectives of enhancing academic quality and increasing international visibility through soft power. The program was launched in response to Indonesia's need for a globally literate youth population capable of becoming cultural ambassadors (Kemendikbudristek 2021). According to Knight (Knight 2022), education diplomacy starts with mutual benefit and long-term goals. IISMA's intention, therefore, lies in sending students not only to study but also to represent Indonesian values in global contexts.

1. In Canada, an awardee at the University of British Columbia (UBC) delivered a research presentation on mangrove conservation, which was later published in a student journal. The student reflected on LinkedIn,

“I wasn’t just studying abroad; I was explaining what Indonesia is every single day” (IISMA LinkedIn 2023).

This statement illustrates how students internalize their dual role as learners and cultural ambassadors, highlighting the personal rationales embedded within national intentions.

More than merely participating in an academic exchange, this student actively engaged in environmental discourse while representing Indonesian ecological perspectives, a subtle but powerful act of intellectual diplomacy. As Knight (Knight 2022) argues, effective knowledge diplomacy rests not only on institutional design but also on how individuals embody and perform its values in real-world contexts. The student’s contribution to academic publishing further elevates the visibility of Indonesian expertise, reinforcing Indonesia’s soft power through environmental leadership and demonstrating how outward mobility can lead to epistemic recognition abroad. This case highlights how IISMA’s rationale, to internationalize Indonesian higher education, is enacted through student agency and output, bridging national interests with global academic ecosystems.

2. Meanwhile, in Spain, IISMA students at the University of Granada hosted a cultural event featuring gamelan and wayang kulit performances. The event drew strong interest from the local community, with one attendee commenting,

“I didn’t know Indonesia had this kind of storytelling tradition” (IISMA YouTube 2023).

These interactions not only introduce Indonesian heritage to new audiences but also reflect the strategic goal of cultural projection embedded in the program’s design.

However, the realization of these intentions varies across contexts. While some awardees actively engage in cultural outreach, organizing batik workshops or participating in campus festivals, others limit their involvement to classroom settings (Dewi and Dewi 2025; Ad Dawya and Okvitawanli 2024). This disparity raises questions about the program’s clarity in communicating its diplomatic mission and equipping participants with tools to fulfill it.

Additionally, the sociopolitical openness of host countries influences IISMA’s effectiveness. In culturally plural nations like the Netherlands and the UK, awardees find greater opportunities for cultural engagement. Conversely, in more homogeneous societies such as Japan or South Korea, students face greater barriers to promoting Indonesian culture (Salsabiilah 2022). As Knight (Knight 2022) emphasizes, context matters in shaping the success of knowledge diplomacy.

A final concern involves inter-ministerial coordination. IISMA is led by Kemendikbudristek, but there is limited evidence of collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Kemenlu), which could potentially strengthen the program's diplomatic coherence. Knight (Knight 2022) argues that effective knowledge diplomacy requires multi-stakeholder synergy, an area where Indonesia still has room for growth. Through these case studies and reflections, IISMA demonstrates that diplomatic rationales are embedded not only in formal academic curricula but also in daily intercultural exchanges. Students become unofficial envoys of Indonesian identity, embodying the strategic intentions of the program through academic, cultural, and interpersonal engagement abroad.

3.2.2 Action & Partners

Jane Knight (Knight 2022) defines *approaches* in knowledge diplomacy as the specific strategies and mechanisms through which international education engagement occurs. These include bilateral or multilateral agreements, people-to-people contact, academic co-production, and thematic collaborations. The Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) adopts various approaches, functioning not only as a student mobility program but also as a platform for building international academic partnerships rooted in reciprocity and shared benefit.

One of IISMA's strengths is its multi-actor and multi-level strategy. The program is coordinated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (MoECRT) in collaboration with host universities across Europe, Asia,

the Americas, and Australia. However, the implementation itself goes beyond formal arrangements. IISMA encourages students to engage in intercultural dialogue and academic exchange, while host institutions are increasingly involved in facilitating cultural events, integrating Indonesian themes in their curricula, and co-organizing joint activities.

According to Knight (Knight 2022), knowledge diplomacy is effective when engagement is based on mutual trust, shared values, and long-term collaboration, not merely transactional mobility. IISMA’s various formats of collaboration mirror this principle. Many host universities have expressed positive responses not only by supporting Indonesian students on campus but also by investing in sustained academic and cultural interactions.

To illustrate how these approaches are enacted in practice, the following table presents selected responses from host universities and local communities during IISMA’s 2021–2023 implementation period. Each example maps directly onto one of Knight’s knowledge diplomacy approaches and includes a brief analytical interpretation.

**Table 3. Responses from Host Universities and Local Communities to IISMA
(2021–2023)**

No.	Type of Coverage	Title	Link	Sentiment
1.	Western University News (Canada)	Indonesian students develop global citizenship by studying abroad at Western	https://news.westernu.ca/2024/12/indonesian-students-study-abroad-at-western/	Positive
2.	Humber Polytechnic News (Canada)	Humber Hosts Indonesian Students for Cultural and	https://business.humber.ca/deans-news/humb	Positive

No.	Type of Coverage	Title	Link	Sentiment
		Academic Exchange	er-hosts-indonesian-students-for-cultural-and-academic-exchange.html	
3.	University of Waterloo News (Canada)	Waterloo welcomes 2024's IISMA students to campus	https://iao.usu.ac.id/en/news/a-transformative-semester-of-learning-and-cultural-exchange	Positive
4.	UC Davis International News (USA)	Indonesian exchange students embrace Canadian culture and share theirs	https://international.uwo.ca/learning/news/2023/indonesian_exchange_students_embrace_canadian_culture_and_share_theirs.html	Positive
5.	University of Zagreb News (Croatia)	Indonesian Cultural Day and IISMA 2024 students at the University of Zagreb	https://www.unizg.hr/en/homepage/news-content/article/indonesian-cultural-day-and-iisma-2024-students-at-university-of-zagreb/	Positive
6.	University News (Malaysia)	A Transformative Semester of Learning and Cultural Exchange (IISMA at Universiti Sains Malaysia)	https://iao.usu.ac.id/en/news/a-transformative-semester-of-learning-and-cultural-exchange	Positive
7.	University Website (Lithuania)	Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) Programme at Vytautas Magnus University	https://www.vdu.lt/en/international-cooperation/indonesian-international-student-mobility-awards-issma-programme/	Positive
8.	Regional News Media (Lithuania)	Lithuania: Indonesian students connect cultures through IISMA	https://baltic-review.com/lithuania-indonesian-students/	Positive

Sources: Official news coverage published by host universities

Each article presented in the table was analyzed using Python NLTK Text Classification, a computational technique within the Natural Language Toolkit (NLTK) that enables systematic processing and categorization of textual data. The

method identifies linguistic patterns and assigns sentiment values, positive, negative, or neutral, based on the occurrence of significant keywords and contextual cues. In this research, the approach was applied to the headlines and coverage of IISMA in foreign media, ensuring that the analysis was consistent and less prone to subjective interpretation. For instance, headlines that emphasized terms such as “*opportunity*” or “*prestigious*” were classified as positive, while those containing words like “*criticism*” or “*challenge*” tended to be coded as negative. Neutral sentiment was found in reports that presented IISMA in descriptive and factual terms without evaluative framing.

The use of NLTK text classification provided empirical rigor by incorporating tokenization, feature extraction, and sentiment categorization into a replicable process. This computational approach enabled the study to move beyond descriptive accounts toward a more systematic and data-driven evaluation of how Indonesia’s educational diplomacy is perceived globally. As a result, the findings offer both consistency and credibility, highlighting the extent to which IISMA contributes to Indonesia’s soft power by shaping international media narratives in measurable ways.

These examples demonstrate that IISMA is not simply a vehicle for outbound student mobility but a platform that operationalizes Knight’s vision of collaborative international education. The diversity of responses from host institutions shows that educational diplomacy can take multiple forms, from informal engagement to institutional partnerships, with each contributing to Indonesia’s long-term soft power strategy in higher education.

The strategic use of these approaches reinforces Indonesia's image as a globally engaged, culturally rich, and academically collaborative nation. As highlighted by Yulisetiari (Yulisetiari 2023), IISMA plays a role in advancing Indonesia's international visibility through the soft channel of education diplomacy, especially in how students and institutions co-develop academic experiences abroad.

3.2.3 Principles & Values

Jane Knight (Knight 2022) identifies five key values defining knowledge diplomacy: mutuality, reciprocity, trust, co-creation, and respect. These values distinguish knowledge diplomacy from traditional internationalization by emphasizing cooperation over competition and long-term relationship building over short-term gains (Knight 2022). This section examines how each of these principles is reflected in the IISMA program as a form of educational diplomacy.

1. Mutuality refers to the shared intent of both partners to gain from and contribute to the collaboration (Knight 2022). IISMA attempts to embody this principle by enabling Indonesian students to both learn from host institutions and share their knowledge about Indonesia in return (Kemendikbudristek 2022). For example, IISMA awardees in Ireland and the Netherlands were invited to contribute to international student panels and share perspectives about Indonesian education and multiculturalism (IISMA Awardee Reflections 2023). These exchanges indicate that host institutions recognize value in Indonesian contributions.

However, the mutual benefit is more visible in individual academic interactions than at the institutional level, as IISMA is still designed as a one-way outbound program (Knight 2022). Without a mechanism to bring international students to Indonesia, the broader structure remains unbalanced, raising questions about how fully mutuality is achieved (Melissen 2005).

2. Reciprocity is reflected in how IISMA students are expected to give back, not just to host institutions through cultural exchange but also to the Indonesian education system upon return. The requirement for final reports, public sharing sessions, and mentoring of prospective participants encourages an ecosystem where learning abroad results in knowledge dissemination at home (IISMA Program Guide 2023).
3. Trust is built incrementally through sustained credibility and visible professionalism, and a compelling case in point is the participation of IISMA awardees at the University of Padua during the *International Staff Mobility Week* in October 2022. One of the IISMA coordinators, Dian Sari Utami, was invited to deliver a keynote presentation, along with other awardees who were recognized for their excellence in attitude, social relations, and academic competence. As Dora Logoni, Head of International Relations at Padua, stated:

“IISMA provides inspiration through the Merdeka Belajar concept, which can be adopted for international mobility programmes in Europe.” (Kemdiktisaintek 2022)

a clear endorsement of trust and respect earned through sustained, high-quality performance.

This example perfectly embodies how consistent student conduct rooted in integrity, adaptability, and respect, can elevate temporary academic exchanges into long-term institutional relationships. It illustrates the principle that trust is not merely granted but earned over time, affirming Knight's (2022) assertion that trust is cultivated through meaningful, reciprocal collaboration. In this context, the IISMA awardees were not passive recipients but active contributors to academic dialogue, producing credible and strategic messaging through their dedication and quality of engagement.

4. Co-creation of knowledge is evident in cases where IISMA students engage in collaborative academic or cultural projects. IISMA students at Warsaw University participated in a joint mini-research project with Polish peers on Southeast Asian students' experiences in Europe. The findings were presented in a student research forum hosted by the university (IISMA Annual Report 2023). One student reflected:

“Our collaborative project with Polish students was not just an assignment; it became a bridge of understanding. It helped us see how Indonesians are perceived and how we adapt abroad.”

This initiative illustrates Knight's (Knight 2022) principle of *co-creation of knowledge*, where both sending and host institutions, or in this case, students, contribute to generating shared insights. Rather than being passive recipients of education, IISMA participants acted as equal contributors in the knowledge exchange process. Such collaboration fosters not only academic enrichment but also mutual understanding, as both sides reflect on cross-cultural experiences and negotiate meaning together. This also demonstrates the potential of student-led inquiry as an informal yet impactful mode of diplomacy, reinforcing the idea that meaningful intellectual partnerships can emerge from peer-level interactions.

5. Respect is foundational throughout IISMA's structure. Pre-departure training includes modules on cultural sensitivity and respectful representation. Moreover, students are encouraged to present Indonesian culture in ways that are authentic yet inclusive. At Utrecht University, students designed an interactive workshop that introduced Indonesian cuisine, folklore, and Islamic traditions in an accessible manner to European peers. One awardee commented,

“I felt proud seeing how our peers appreciated Indonesian food and listened curiously to our folk stories. We even discussed similarities with Dutch traditions.”

(Utrecht Student Events 2023).

Despite these strengths, institutional reinforcement of these values remains uneven. For instance, trust and co-creation are more visible in

some host countries than others, mainly depending on the initiative of local faculty and awardees. Similarly, while mutuality is encouraged, long-term platforms for co-authorship, alumni exchange, or research partnerships are still limited.

Moreover, future analysis may explore how the cultural openness of host countries affects the success of these values in practice. For example, countries with strong traditions of multiculturalism, such as the Netherlands or the United Kingdom, may provide more fertile ground for mutuality and respect than societies with limited foreign student engagement. A comparative study could also investigate how these principles manifest differently in collective-oriented cultures like Japan versus more individualistic academic environments like Germany. This contextual sensitivity is vital for developing more adaptable and effective education diplomacy strategies.

3.2.4 Modes & Approaches

In Jane Knight's (Knight 2022) framework of knowledge diplomacy, *modes* refer to the types or channels of relationships through which international collaboration occurs, such as bilateral versus multilateral, or government-led versus people-to-people. Meanwhile, *approaches* indicate the methods or strategies used to implement those relationships, ranging from formal institutional agreements to informal interpersonal exchanges. These two dimensions help explain how educational diplomacy is carried out, shaped by actors, context, and goals (Knight 2022).

Knight emphasizes that the selection of modes and approaches directly influences the depth, sustainability, and tone of international partnerships. A bilateral government-to-government mode may yield policy alignment, while informal people-to-people engagement can create trust and grassroots cultural appreciation (Knight 2022). IISMA reflects these variations in its practice, demonstrating structured diplomacy and organic interactions.

Bilateral vs. Multilateral

IISMA primarily functions through bilateral arrangements between Indonesia and individual host institutions. Each agreement between Kemendikbudristek and a partner university typically includes tuition waivers, cultural orientation, and tailored academic experiences for Indonesian awardees (Kemendikbudristek 2023). For instance, the collaboration between IISMA and Leiden University led to the development of a new course, *Contemporary Indonesia*, introduced in 2023. This course institutionalized Indonesian studies in the Netherlands and reflected growing intellectual reciprocity (Leiden University 2023).

While most IISMA engagements are bilateral, some awardees and alumni have participated in multilateral initiatives. For example, IISMA alumni from various European universities were invited to the 2023 ASEAN Youth Intercultural Dialogue, co-hosted by UNESCO and the ASEAN Foundation. This multilateral participation expanded the reach of IISMA beyond academic mobility, engaging students in regional diplomacy and intercultural policy discussions (ASEAN Foundation 2023).

Formal vs. Informal

On the formal level, IISMA operates through structured institutional frameworks such as MoUs, curriculum mapping, and co-hosted research forums. The 2024 agreement between Kemendikbudristek and the University of Missouri–Kansas City (UMKC), for instance, facilitated joint curriculum development and collaborative research in the fields of public health and education (Antara News 2024). This formalization adds institutional depth and sustainability to academic mobility (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

On the informal side, awardees often take initiatives beyond their academic mandates. These include creating Instagram or YouTube content that introduces Indonesian culture, joining local student organizations, and organizing independent cultural nights. A notable example is the initiative by IISMA students in Spain, who independently hosted a “Batik Day” celebration at Universidad de Salamanca in 2022, inviting peers and faculty to learn the history and art of batik (IISMA LinkedIn 2022). These informal acts humanize diplomacy and foster genuine people-to-people relationships, aligning with Knight’s emphasis on relational engagement.

Government-led vs. People-to-People

IISMA is a government-led initiative. It is designed, funded, and managed by Kemendikbudristek, with support from LPDP and the Ministry of State Secretariat. The program includes pre-departure training, academic oversight, and reintegration assignments (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

However, IISMA's most impactful diplomacy often stems from its people-to-people dimension. Students live, study, and interact directly with foreign communities. At Kyungpook National University in South Korea, IISMA awardees collaborated with local NGOs to teach Bahasa Indonesia to migrant children from Southeast Asia, an example of grassroots cultural engagement (Dewi and Dewi 2025). This initiative reflects Knight's (Knight 2022) vision of "trust-based, long-term academic collaboration grounded in real-life engagement."

Furthermore, several IISMA alumni have stayed connected to their host institutions through research collaborations, peer mentorship programs, or as guest speakers. These ongoing relationships help sustain the program's diplomatic objectives even after the awardees return to Indonesia (Salsabiilah 2022).

The IISMA program's strength lies in its hybridity. By engaging simultaneously in bilateral and multilateral, formal and informal, and state-led and people-centered modes, it mirrors the multifaceted character of modern knowledge diplomacy. Yet, challenges remain, particularly in balancing government oversight with student autonomy and translating informal encounters into sustainable institutional outcomes. For IISMA to mature as a tool of educational diplomacy, a clearer articulation of its long-term strategic approach across all three modes is essential (Knight 2022).

3.2.5 Activities & Instruments

In the framework of knowledge diplomacy, activities and instruments represent the practical and operational dimensions that connect strategic goals with

outcomes in international education (Knight 2022). Activities refer to observable and measurable engagements such as academic collaboration, cultural events, or exchange programs. On the other hand, instruments include tools and mechanisms that support these activities, such as funding models, formal agreements, and digital platforms (Knight 2022).

IISMA (Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards), initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), utilizes these two dimensions effectively by combining student mobility, institutional partnerships, cultural exchange, and digital storytelling to promote Indonesia's visibility and influence globally (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

Between 2021 and 2023, IISMA facilitated the outbound mobility of over 4,500 undergraduate students to more than 100 higher education institutions in 34 countries (IISMA 2023). These students became the primary agents in Indonesia's education diplomacy framework, engaging in classroom discussions, academic coursework, and cultural events abroad. This aligns with Joseph Nye's (Nye 2004) argument that consistent international presence fosters familiarity and attractiveness, both central components of soft power. In this case, student mobility becomes more than just academic; it becomes a symbolic representation of national values and identity.

In Poland, IISMA awardees were invited to deliver cultural talks in local community centers, while in Germany, participation was largely confined to academic coursework without significant cultural outreach (Kemendikbudristek

2023). This contrast reflects student initiative and host country receptivity, key variables in knowledge diplomacy outcomes.

Some awardees engage in academically meaningful and culturally impactful activities that transcend formal publications. A notable example is the IISMA students from Diponegoro University (Undip) who participated in a National Presentation event at Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic. One awardee, Fathia Khaerani, performed a traditional Balinese dance complete with authentic attire, teaching visitors simple Indonesian phrases like “How are you?” and “Thank you.” As Fathia expressed,

“We hope that, through the performances we have presented, we can introduce Indonesian culture on a bigger stage, namely the international stage.” (Universitas Diponegoro 2023)

This activity reflects the principle of co-creating knowledge as defined by Knight, where academic mobility fosters mutual understanding and intercultural enrichment, not just formal collaboration. Through such immersive, voluntary cultural exchanges, the participants acted as agents of soft power, cultivating trust and understanding across borders. They did not just present academic credentials, they embodied Indonesia’s pluralism, creativity, and hospitality, operationalizing strategic messaging through cultural diplomacy in an academic context.

Additionally, institutional partnerships enhance academic diplomacy. The University of Missouri–Kansas City (UMKC) and IISMA signed a memorandum of understanding to collaborate on digital learning and public health programs,

involving co-designed curricula and research initiatives (Antara News 2024). This transforms academic mobility into a platform for bilateral educational development.

In an era dominated by digital communication, IISMA awardees leverage social media to amplify their soft power roles. For example, a 2022 awardee in Spain produced a vlog titled “Cooking Rendang for My Spanish Roommates,” which went viral on TikTok and sparked comments about Indonesian culture (IISMA Official Instagram 2023). These narratives personalize diplomacy, resonating with Nye’s (Nye 2004) idea that soft power is exercised not through imposition, but through attraction and storytelling.

However, without centralized management, such digital content risks becoming isolated. Knight (Knight 2022) notes that digital diplomacy must be strategically linked with institutional goals to achieve sustained impact. IISMA may benefit from integrating digital storytelling training into its pre-departure program and collaborating with embassies to amplify messages.

Compared to LPDP, which focuses primarily on postgraduate studies and enforces return service obligations, IISMA prioritizes cultural ambassadorship and undergraduate engagement without rigid reintegration structures (LPDP 2022). While LPDP produces academically elite individuals, IISMA leverages student authenticity and relatability for greater grassroots impact. BSBI, by contrast, brings foreigners to Indonesia for cultural immersion, working inversely to IISMA. Together, they represent complementary poles in Indonesia’s public diplomacy spectrum (Kemlu 2022).

Nonetheless, IISMA's lack of a formalized alumni engagement platform and inter-ministerial coordination (particularly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) limits its scalability and sustainability as a national soft power instrument. Strengthening such collaborations could elevate IISMA's standing in the global education diplomacy arena (Kemendikbudristek 2023).

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, IISMA has positioned itself not merely as an academic exchange initiative but as a comprehensive soft power mechanism rooted in the principles of knowledge diplomacy. By aligning its objectives with mutual understanding, institutional collaboration, and cultural engagement, IISMA reflects Indonesia's strategic intent to participate in global dialogue not only through formal diplomacy but through everyday academic and intercultural interactions. Yet, to enhance its long-term diplomatic value, IISMA must continue evolving, adopting more inclusive evaluation systems, expanding its alumni networks, and strengthening cross-ministerial coordination. Only through such holistic development can IISMA solidify its role as a flagship instrument of Indonesia's global educational diplomacy.

3.3 Synthesis of the Two Frameworks

The Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) program exemplifies how education can serve as a dual instrument of soft power projection and knowledge-based diplomacy. This synthesis draws from Joseph Nye's theory of soft power to explain *why* education plays a role in diplomacy, and Jane Knight's framework of knowledge diplomacy to explain *how* it is implemented in practice.

Joseph Nye (Nye 2004) defines soft power as a nation's ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction rather than coercion or payment. In the case of IISMA, this attraction is conveyed through the presence of Indonesian students in universities abroad, where they embody and promote Indonesia's culture, values, and national identity. These students engage in daily communication with foreign peers, participate in international academic and social spaces, and represent Indonesia's pluralistic and diverse image through informal diplomacy. Their active involvement in cultural festivals, student organizations, and classroom discussions demonstrates the soft power potential of education.

Nye highlights three key components of soft power: daily communication, strategic messaging, and long-term relationship building. IISMA operationalizes all three.

1. For instance, when awardees socialize with host communities, explain Indonesian traditions, or share perspectives in academic discussions, daily interactions occur.
2. Students' strategic messaging is reflected in the way they present narratives about Indonesia's democratic values, religious tolerance, and global orientation, especially through social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Instagram, and YouTube.
3. Finally, the establishment of alumni clubs, joint publications, and academic networks supports long-term engagement and influence.

While Nye provides a useful lens to understand the power of attraction, Jane Knight's concept of knowledge diplomacy adds further analytical depth by focusing on

reciprocal and structured collaboration between academic actors across borders (Knight 2022). Knight defines knowledge diplomacy as the use of international higher education and research to strengthen relationships between countries based on mutual interests, trust, and the co-creation of knowledge. Unlike Nye's model, which emphasizes the power *to influence*, Knight's framework emphasizes the process *of building relationships*.

In the context of IISMA, knowledge diplomacy is evident in the cooperative efforts between Indonesian universities, the Ministry of Education, and host institutions abroad. These efforts go beyond sending students; they involve institutional coordination, program design, and shared goals. Knight's five dimensions of knowledge diplomacy, intention, actors, principles, modes, and instruments, are reflected in IISMA:

1. Intention & Rationales: IISMA promotes Indonesia's visibility through education while fostering mutual academic growth.
2. Actors & Partners: The program involves diverse stakeholders, including students, domestic and foreign universities, government agencies, and international communities.
3. Principles & Values: The program operates on values such as non-commercial collaboration, respect for diversity, and shared learning.
4. Modes & Approaches: IISMA implements both bilateral (Indonesia–host university) and multilateral cooperation through university networks.
5. Activities & Instruments: The program uses structured mechanisms, such as pre-departure training, scholarship schemes, alumni clubs, and media platforms, to sustain engagement.

The following section reformulates the original Table 3 in narrative form to further illustrate how these two frameworks interact. It shows how each theoretical lens applies specifically to the IISMA program.

Table 4. Theoretical Frameworks Application

Theory	Application
Joseph Nye Soft Power Theory	● IISMA students serve as informal ambassadors who represent and promote Indonesia's image abroad. ● Through activities such as cultural showcases, volunteering, and participation in international forums, students project Indonesia's values of tolerance, diversity, and openness. ● Digital storytelling, including social media and blogs, allows students to communicate Indonesia's narratives to global audiences in authentic and persuasive ways. ● Long-term engagement through alumni relations and personal academic networks enhances Indonesia's sustained visibility and influence without formal diplomatic intervention.
Jane Knight Knowledge Diplomacy Theory	● IISMA facilitates outbound student mobility and institutional collaboration between Indonesian universities and global academic partners. ● Joint activities, such as guest lectures, cultural weeks, and collaborative forums, reflect the program's reciprocal and cooperative orientation. ● The formation of the IISMA Alumni Club (IAC) strengthens long-term academic and cultural ties, enabling former awardees to become active contributors to global knowledge networks. ● Positive responses from host universities, including new academic offerings and joint research projects, illustrate how IISMA fosters shared academic growth and international goodwill.

Sources: Knight (2022) and Nye (2004)

By integrating these frameworks, IISMA emerges as both a projection tool and a bridge-building mechanism. Soft power explains *why* Indonesia invests in such programs:

cultivating admiration, legitimacy, and influence. Knowledge diplomacy describes *how* this influence is built sustainably: through ethical academic engagement, shared initiatives, and long-term trust.

However, the synthesis also reveals certain limitations. While IISMA's cultural appeal is relatively strong, institutional mechanisms for long-term collaboration remain uneven. Alumni programs are promising but underfunded. Coordination between the education and foreign affairs ministries can be improved to align IISMA with broader diplomatic strategies. Still, IISMA represents a shift in Indonesia's foreign policy posture that embraces soft power and academic partnership as central components of 21st-century diplomacy.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

4.1 Conclusion

This research has examined the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) as a strategic initiative in educational diplomacy, framed through the dual lenses of Joseph Nye's soft power theory and Jane Knight's concept of knowledge diplomacy. The analysis of IISMA's implementation from 2021 to 2023 reveals that while the program serves an academic purpose, its broader diplomatic implications are substantial and evolving.

The findings demonstrate that IISMA functions not merely as a scholarship scheme but as a soft power vehicle through which Indonesia projects its cultural identity, values, and intellectual capital to the world. Through personal engagement, cultural showcases, institutional partnerships, and media visibility, IISMA awardees have acted as informal diplomats. At the same time, the program has cultivated long-term trust with host universities, resulting in collaborative research, joint curriculum development, and mutual recognition. These dimensions exemplify Jane Knight's model of knowledge diplomacy in action.

Despite these achievements, challenges remain. The number of participants, approximately 3,000–4,500 over three years, while meaningful, raises questions about the scale of impact. The program's heavy reliance on the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) without formalized inter-ministerial collaboration, particularly with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, may limit its potential as a

national soft power instrument. Additionally, inconsistencies in post-program alumni integration and a lack of long-term strategic planning risk weakening the sustainability of the program's diplomatic outcomes.

The comparison with other Indonesian scholarship programs, such as LPDP and BSBI, also reveals strengths and gaps. While LPDP emphasizes academic excellence and BSBI focuses on inbound cultural diplomacy, IISMA represents a hybrid model that could be elevated through institutional support, alumni-driven diplomacy, and deeper cross-sector partnerships.

4.2 Recommendations

This study has analyzed the implementation of Indonesia's educational diplomacy through the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) from 2021 to 2023, using Joseph Nye's soft power theory and Jane Knight's knowledge diplomacy framework. However, like any academic research, this study has its limitations, which present potential opportunities for further exploration by future researchers.

1. First, the scope of this study was limited to policy-level and theoretical analysis of the IISMA program. It did not include direct fieldwork involving key stakeholders such as alumni, program coordinators, or host university staff. Future researchers are therefore encouraged to conduct in-depth qualitative research involving interviews with IISMA alumni, lecturers from host institutions, and policy designers at the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (MoECRT). Such primary data could offer richer insights into the program's lived experiences and diplomatic dimensions.

2. Second, this research focused on a macro-level understanding of Indonesia's image and positioning through IISMA as a soft power instrument. Future studies could examine the micro-level impacts of the program, such as the transformative experiences of individual students, the influence of cross-cultural immersion on national identity, or the utilization of alumni networks as channels for long-term diplomatic engagement. These alternative angles would benefit from interdisciplinary approaches that combine international relations, intercultural communication, and educational sociology.
3. Third, this study observes educational diplomacy primarily from the perspective of the sending country, Indonesia. Future comparative research could examine how similar student mobility programs are implemented by other countries, particularly those in Southeast Asia or the Global South. A comparative approach would enrich understanding how educational diplomacy strategies vary across national contexts and reveal best practices or shared challenges in leveraging international education for foreign policy goals.
4. Fourth, while this study employed two major conceptual lenses, soft power and knowledge diplomacy, it is important to acknowledge that educational diplomacy can also be analyzed through other theoretical frameworks. These may include public diplomacy, nation branding, or international political economy approaches focusing on the mobility of human capital. Future researchers are encouraged to experiment with alternative or complementary theories to expand the analytical depth of studies on educational diplomacy.

By expanding the focus on actors, methods, comparative cases, and theoretical perspectives, future research on Indonesia's educational diplomacy, particularly through programs like IISMA, holds significant potential to contribute academically and practically to international relations, education policy, and global engagement.

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