

INTEGRATING THE KAMPUS MERDEKA PROGRAM INTO ISLAMIC UNIVERSITIES IN INDONESIA: A STUDY OF IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT ON ISLAMIC SCIENCES

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Abstract

Indonesia's development vision, as outlined in the 2019–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJM), is directed toward achieving quality education. In line with this vision, all educational institutions are expected to uphold high standards in order to realize excellence in education. This vision aligns with the policy direction initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture through the "Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka" (MBKM) policy. The MBKM program refers to Ministerial Decree No. 74, as detailed in the official MBKM guidebook, which serves as a foundational reference for all educational programs and learning activities aimed at advancing higher education institutions. This paper examines the implementation of the "Merdeka Kampus" program at three Islamic universities: UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, UIN Sumatera Utara Medan, and UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, using a qualitative approach. The findings indicate that the three universities have developed MBKM guidelines. In general, the implementation is still in the early stages, focused primarily on socialization efforts and workshops for university leaders and academic departments. Several specific MBKM activities have been carried out, although not yet to their full potential. Program implementation has also encountered obstacles, largely due to unresolved discussions among policymakers and relevant stakeholders. Nevertheless, the implications of the MBKM program for the development of Islamic sciences are

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considerable, as these fields are central to the identity and advancement of Islamic higher education institutions.

Keywords: Merdeka Campus Implementation; Merdeka Campus Implications; Islamic Sciences.

Abstrak

Visi pembangunan Indonesia, berdasarkan RPJM 2019-2024, arahnya kepada pendidikan berkualitas. Melalui visi tersebut semua lembaga pendidikan harus berkualitas agar mencapai pendidikan yang unggul. Visi ini relevan dengan arah kebijakan yang dicanangkan oleh kemendikbud melalui Kebijakan MBKM. Program MBKM mengacu kepada keputusan Menteri No 74 dituangkan dalam buku panduan MBKM dan menjadi landasan utama bagi setiap program dan kegiatan Pembelajaran dalam Mencapai Perguruan Tinggi Unggul. Tulisan ini mengkaji Program Kampus Merdeka di UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, UIN Sumatera Utara Medan dan UIN Imam Bonjol Padang dengan pendekatan kualitatif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Program MBKM telah dirumuskan tentang Pedoman MBKM oleh tiga perguruan Tinggi yang menjadi Lokasi penelitian. Secara umum implementasi MBKM baru pada tahapan sosialisasi dan workshop untuk pimpinan dan prodi. Selain itu juga beberapa kegiatan MBKM tertentu telah dilaksanakan meskipun belum maksimal. Pelaksanaan program MBKM juga masih terkendala karena belum dibicarakan secara jelas dan tuntas oleh para pihak pengambil kebijakan dan pemangku kepentingan terkait. Kendati demikian implikasi program MBKM terhadap pengembangan Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman juga sangat signifikan untuk dilakukan. Ini dikarenakan Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman merupakan bidang inti bagi eksistensi dan pengembangan Perguruan Tinggi Keislaman.

Kata Kunci: Implementasi Kampus Merdeka; Implikasi Kampus Merdeka; Ilmu-ilmu Keislaman

مستخلص

تتمحور رؤية التنمية في إندونيسيا خلال خطة التنمية متوسطة الأجل 2019-2024 حول تحقيق تعليم عالي الجودة. من هذا المنطلق، يجب على جميع المؤسسات التعليمية أن ترتقي بمعاييرها لتتمكن من تقديم تعليم متميز. هذه الرؤية تتوافق مع السياسات التي وضعتها وزارة التعليم والثقافة من خلال برنامج "الحرم الجامعي الحر (MBKM)"، والذي يستند إلى القرار الوزاري رقم 74، ويُعتبر الدليل الأساسي لكل برنامج ونشاط تعليمي يهدف إلى تحقيق جامعات متميزة. تتناول هذه الدراسة برنامج الحرم الجامعي الحر في ثلاث جامعات إسلامية رئيسية: جامعة الرانيري الإسلامية الحكومية في بندا آتشيه، وجامعة سومطرة الشمالية الإسلامية الحكومية في ميدان، وجامعة إمام بونجول الإسلامية الحكومية في بادانغ، وذلك من خلال منهجية نوعية. أظهرت النتائج أن هذه الجامعات قد وضعت أدلة إرشادية خاصة ببرنامج الحرم الجامعي الحر (MBKM)، إلا أن التطبيق العملي لا يزال في مراحله الأولى، حيث يقتصر على حملات التوعية وورش العمل الموجهة للقيادات الأكاديمية وأقسام البرامج الدراسية. كما تم تنفيذ بعض الأنشطة المتعلقة بالبرنامج، لكن بشكل محدود ولم يصل إلى المستوى المطلوب بعد. تواجه عملية تنفيذ البرنامج تحديات بسبب عدم وجود نقاش شامل وواضح بين صانعي القرار وأصحاب المصلحة المعنيين، ومع ذلك، فإن تأثير برنامج MBKM على تطوير العلوم الإسلامية يعد مهمًا جدًا للتنفيذ، نظراً لأن هذه العلوم تشكل الركيزة الأساسية لوجود الجامعات الإسلامية وتطورها.

الكلمات الرئيسية: تنفيذ برنامج الحرم الجامعي الحر; آثار برنامج الحرم الجامعي الحر; العلوم الإسلامية.

A. Introduction

The 2019–2024 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN) articulates a national vision that emphasizes the pursuit of high-quality education in Indonesia. In line with this vision, all educational institutions are expected to maintain high standards and develop distinctive strengths¹. This direction is closely aligned with the higher education policy framework set forth by the Ministry of Education and Culture (Kemendikbud) through the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom to Learn) initiative, which seeks to ensure accessible and high-quality education for all Indonesian citizens.²

The realization of the *Merdeka Belajar* policy involves the enhancement of leadership competencies, cross-sectoral collaboration, cultural development, infrastructure improvements, and the integration of technology in all educational units. It also includes reforms in educational policies, procedures, and funding, along with improvements in curriculum design, pedagogy, and assessment methods. At the higher education level, this policy is operationalized through the *Kampus Merdeka* (Independent Campus) initiative, which encompasses the development of new academic programs, changes to the accreditation system, the granting of legal entity status to state universities, and the provision of opportunities for students to undertake up to three semesters of study outside their main academic program³.

The *Kampus Merdeka* policy is formalized in the Decree of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia No. 74⁴ and further elaborated in the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* guidebook published by the Directorate General of Higher Education in 2020. As stipulated in Ministerial Regulation No. 3 of 2020, the program allows for various types of learning activities, both within and beyond a student's primary field of study. These activities include student exchanges, internships or practical work, teaching assistance in educational institutions, research projects, humanitarian initiatives, entrepreneurship, independent studies or projects, and community development or thematic service-learning programs (*Kuliah Kerja Nyata Tematik*)⁵.

¹ Nur Syam, *Peran PTKIN Dalam Membangun Harmoni Sosial Di Era Milenial* (Sorong: STAIN Sorong, 2018).

² Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, *Rencana Strategis Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi 2020-2024* (Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, 2020). Saminan, S., Irwandi, I., Kamza, M., & Rasul, M. S. B. (2024). Acehese Ethnoscience As An Interdisciplinary Approach In Physics Education: Innovating In The Era Of Merdeka Belajar. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 12(3), 1071–1098.

³ Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI.

⁴ Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, “Undang-Undang Keputusan Menteri Pendidikan Dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia, Nomor 74/P/2021 Tentang Pengakuan Satuan Kredit Semester Pembelajaran Program Kampus Merdeka” (Jakarta, 2021).

⁵ Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, *Buku Panduan Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (Jakarta: Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2020).

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The organization of higher education in Indonesia must adhere to the National Standards for Higher Education (SN-DIKTI) as outlined in Ministerial Regulation No. 3 of 2020, which has been operationalized through the *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy framework (<https://ummetro.ac.id/perspektif-mbkm-dalam-pendidikan-tinggi/>). Consequently, the MBKM policy serves as the foundational reference for the development of academic programs and learning activities aimed at improving the quality of higher education and achieving superior institutional accreditation.

In practice, however, many higher education institutions in Indonesia particularly State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri, or PTKIN) have encountered significant challenges in implementing the *Kampus Merdeka* program within their academic curricula. These challenges stem not only from limitations in human resources but also from insufficient external support, which can become a barrier when institutional partnerships are not effectively managed or sustained.

Nonetheless, the necessity of implementing this policy cannot be overlooked, especially for institutions aspiring to attain higher accreditation status in the future. The pursuit of superior accreditation now demands the strategic, effective, and sustainable development of *Kampus Merdeka* initiatives, moving beyond merely instrumental or superficial implementation. Therefore, it is essential to examine the implementation of the *Kampus Merdeka* policy within PTKIN environments, specifically at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, UIN Sumatera Utara Medan, and UIN Imam Bonjol Padang.

Research Methodology

This study is a field-based qualitative research aimed at understanding the extent to which a particular program has been implemented. Donald Ary outlines several characteristics of qualitative research, including a focus on context and meaning related to a phenomenon, as well as the use of inductive analysis⁶. This qualitative method is employed to achieve the research objectives, namely to describe the profiles and implementation achievements of the *Kampus Merdeka* program as formulated by three higher education institutions, to map and explain the strategic policies and activities of the program, and to identify the challenges that hinder its success.

Data collection in this study was carried out through observation, interviews, and

⁶ Donald Ary, *Introduction to Research in Education*. Sixth Edition (New York: Thomson learning, 2002).

document analysis.⁷ Observation was used to observe, record, and interpret information relevant to the research objectives. Interviews were conducted as purposeful conversations, where questions were posed to and answered by informants.⁸ These interviews were carried out in both in-depth and structured formats.⁹ The sequence of questions, the wording, and the manner of delivery remained consistent for each informant across different respondent categories. Through these interviews, rich and detailed information regarding the implementation of MBKM was obtained.¹⁰

Legal Foundation

The implementation of the *Right to Learn for Three Semesters Outside the Study Program* policy is supported by the following legal instruments:

1. Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System;
2. Law No. 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education;
3. Government Regulation No. 4 of 2014 concerning the Implementation of Higher Education and the Management of Higher Education Institutions;
4. Presidential Regulation No. 8 of 2012 concerning the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI);
5. Regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration No. 17 of 2019 concerning General Guidelines for Village Development and Empowerment; and
6. Regulation of the Minister of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration No. 18 of 2019 concerning General Guidelines for Village Community Assistance.

The *Kampus Merdeka* policy is also reinforced by five key regulatory frameworks that provide universities with a solid legal basis to implement it. These legal frameworks include:

1. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3 of 2020 on National Standards for Higher Education;

⁷ Juwaini Juwaini et al., "Ibn Miskawaih's Ethical Philosophy and Its Relevance to Moral Education in Indonesian Secondary Schools," *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun* 13, no. 1 (2025): 695–720.

⁸ Patrisius Istiarto Dwiwandono, *Meneliti Itu Tidak Sulit, Metodologi Penelitian Sosial Dan Bahasa* (Yogyakarta: Deepublish, 2015), 102.

⁹ Lexy J. Moleong, *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif* (Bandung: Remaja Rosda Karya, 2006).

¹⁰ Matthew B. Miles dan A. Michael Huberman, *An Expanded Source Book: Quality Data Analysis, Qualitative, Terj. Tjetjep Rohendi Rohid, Analisis Data Kualitatif: Buku Sumber Tentang Metode-Metode Baru* (Jakarta: Penerbit Universitas Indonesia, 1992), 12.

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2. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 4 of 2020 on the Transformation of State Universities into Legal Entity State Universities;
3. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 5 of 2020 on Accreditation of Study Programs and Higher Education Institutions;
4. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 6 of 2020 on Undergraduate Admissions at State Universities;
5. Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 7 of 2020 on the Establishment, Amendment, and Dissolution of State Universities, and the Establishment, Amendment, and Revocation of Licenses for Private Universities.

In line with the perspective and policies introduced through the *Kampus Merdeka* initiative, efforts to develop higher education particularly in the field of teaching and learning are inevitably linked to external components and stakeholders. The active engagement of society, industry, technological advancements, and the ongoing currents of change and globalization, along with projections of a future marked by complex challenges, demand a high standard of higher education. This expectation also applies to State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri*, PTKIN) in Indonesia. Higher education is directly involved in global transformations, serving as a key agent in shaping the international environment. It plays a vital role in the creation, exchange, and application of knowledge within the global market. Globalization has also generated an academic climate where knowledge and information are increasingly valued and globalized—often surpassing economic issues in importance.¹¹

The current higher education system seeks to respond to multiple challenges that reflect the evolving demands of society. As a result, the mission of universities must be re-examined and redefined in light of these challenges, including the globalization and massification of higher education, the digitalization of teaching and distance learning, and the rise of higher education entrepreneurship.¹²

This theoretical foundation is aligned with the **constructivist paradigm**, which emphasizes active student learning and self-determined thinking and inquiry. Its focus lies in

¹¹ Wendi M. Jenkins Pamela Lemoine, "Global Higher Education: Development and Implications," *Journal of Education and Development* 1, no. 1 (2017): 58–71. Wardani, H. K., Sujarwo, Rakhmawati, Y., & Cahyandaru, P. (2023). Eanalysis Of The Impact Of The Merdeka Curriculum Policy On Stakeholders At Primary School. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 11(2), 513–530.

¹² Daniela Olo, Leonida Correia, and Conceição Rego, "Higher Education Institutions and Development: Missions, Models, and Challenges," *Journal of Social Studies Education Research* 12, no. 2 (2021).

how students construct meaning about life and the world around them. The constructivist paradigm is widely recognized as a democratic approach that situates students' social roles within a framework of radical educational reform. Learning is oriented toward bridging the gap between prior knowledge and new experiences. Under this model, students take an active role, while lecturers serve as facilitators who initiate the learning process through negotiation.¹³ Constructivism thus offers a new educational perspective that strategically aligns with the reformative principles envisioned by the *Kampus Merdeka* policy.

B. Discussion

1. The Philosophical Foundations of The MBKM Policy

The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy within the curriculum of Islamic Higher Education Institutions is fundamentally aimed at fostering institutional development and advancement in the three pillars (*Tri Dharma*) of higher education: education, research, and community service. From a strategic standpoint, the implementation of MBKM holds substantial potential, as its conceptual framework aligns with the demands of both the present and the future. As such, the MBKM curriculum content is designed to meet international standards and remain competitive in the global era. These contents are inseparable from the underlying philosophical foundations of the program, namely its **ontological**, **epistemological**, and **axiological** bases.¹⁴

a. Ontological Foundation of MBKM

The MBKM program rests on an ontological foundation, which serves as the basis for understanding its conceptual identity and existence. This foundation addresses philosophical questions concerning the essence of MBKM and the nature of the objects (or components) within its scope. In addition to identifying the essential characteristics of MBKM, the ontological foundation also defines the criteria for the program's content, distinguishing between its **formal objects** (those that differentiate MBKM from other educational models) and its **material objects** (those that may share similarities with other programs).

b. Epistemological Foundation of MBKM

¹³ Ahmad Taufiq, "Paradigma Baru Pendidikan Tinggi Dan Makna Kuliah Bagi Mahasiswa," *Jurnal Politik Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 10, no. 1 (2018): 34–52.

¹⁴ Mukhtar, M., Haniffa, M. A., Paidi, Z. bin, & Thaib, M. M. (2022). Involvement of Families as Owners of Cultural Heritage Improving Religious Tourism in Banda Aceh: Perspective of Maslahah Theory. *Samarah*, 6(2), 655–677. Ayu, R. F., & Kiramang, K. (2023). The Family's Roles in the Effects of Working from Home During the Covid-19 Pandemic on Children (A Case Study of Families in Banda Aceh City). *El-Usrah*, 6(1), 27–43.

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The MBKM program is grounded in an **epistemological foundation**, which serves as the basis for understanding the methods and approaches used in its implementation. This foundation defines the scope of methodologies and approaches (i.e., the means of acquiring understanding or knowledge) relevant to MBKM and the issues surrounding its application. At the same time, it delineates the disciplinary domains (fields of study) that are involved in the implementation process.

c. Axiological Foundation of MBKM

In addition to the two foundations mentioned above, the MBKM program is also supported by an **axiological foundation**, which outlines the values embedded within its implementation process. This foundation determines the scope of the content and application of MBKM in relation to the significance and criteria of various values both **ethical** and **aesthetic** such as utility and benefit. This value-oriented approach also serves as a point of departure for both the ontological and epistemological foundations of the MBKM program.

2. Implementation of The MBKM Program at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh

The *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program is a continued development of study programs designed under the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI), with the aim of achieving comprehensive learning outcomes. Within the KKNI-based curriculum, elements such as attitudes and values, knowledge, general skills, and specific competencies have already been formulated by the policymakers at UIN Ar-Raniry. However, the university has not yet fully implemented the MBKM curriculum, as the policy, though formally established, remains in an incomplete stage. The implementation of the MBKM curriculum at UIN Ar-Raniry is driven by the evolving demands of science, 21st-century competencies, and skills. In 2021, UIN Ar-Raniry issued official guidelines through Rector's Decree No. 33 of 2021 concerning the Implementation Guidelines for the MBKM Program. These guidelines serve as the primary reference for the execution of MBKM activities on campus.¹⁵ Efforts have continued through the dissemination of information to academic departments (study programs) and the establishment of collaborations with relevant external institutions.

As part of its early efforts in implementing MBKM, UIN Ar-Raniry initiated the program by organizing workshops on managing the *Kampus Merdeka* system for students. These workshops represent the university's initial steps in adopting the *Merdeka Belajar/Kampus Merdeka* policy in line with directives from the Ministry of Education,

¹⁵ Wawancara dengan Warek 1 pada tanggal 12 Juli 2023

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Culture, Research, and Technology.¹⁶ This commitment has been supported by prior initiatives undertaken before the current university leadership, including workshops that highlighted the urgent need to align higher education policies with the MBKM framework particularly regarding the provision that allows students to pursue up to three semesters of learning outside their home institution.

According to the university official, Ministerial Regulation No. 3 of 2020 on National Standards for Higher Education—which serves as the legal basis for the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy outlines four core mandates: the facilitation of new study program establishment, the reform of the accreditation system for higher education institutions, the transformation of universities into legal entities, and the right for students to study for three semesters outside their primary study program. The right to study outside the program, he explained, grants students the opportunity to take a number of credit units (SKS) through a variety of learning activities beyond their enrolled major. Students may, for example, spend one semester taking courses across different disciplines outside their home department.

The design and implementation of MBKM are comprehensively outlined in the official MBKM regulatory guidebook, which details the hierarchical responsibilities of university stakeholders including university leadership, faculties, academic departments, student affairs divisions, and university information and data units (PTIPD). Ultimately, the practical implementation of MBKM rests on the policies set by faculties and academic departments, given that the university has already established its formal regulations through the *Guidelines for MBKM Implementation at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh*, published in 2021 by the university's Institute for Quality Assurance (LPM).¹⁷ The successful execution of the MBKM program requires thorough preparation in all aspects, along with strong support from the entire academic community including students in order to ensure that the goals of the program can be fully achieved.¹⁸

The future targets and preparations for implementing the MBKM program at UIN Ar-Raniry continue to strengthen institutional understanding of MBKM across all levels. The program is expected to be carried out collaboratively between study programs and faculties within the university. This realization, however, depends on the establishment of strong institutional commitment particularly from the departments directly responsible for

¹⁶ Wawancara dengan Warek 1 pada tanggal 12 Juli 2023

¹⁷ Abdul Khatib, Pedoman Pelaksanaan MBKM UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh (Banda Aceh: Ar-Raniry Press, 2022). Nurwahyuni, N., & ZA, T. (2025). Enhancing Teacher Professionalism through the Development of a Positive Self-Concept Based on Communication Psychology. *Jurnal Nispatti*, 10(3), 265-284.

¹⁸ Wawancara dengan ketua LPM Pada tanggal 11 Juli 2023

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implementing the MBKM activities.¹⁹ An illustrative example comes from the Faculty of Ushuluddin, where students conducted *KPM* (community engagement programs) on campus. While the activities were successfully completed, the process of validating and authorizing academic credit for these activities proved to be highly complex and bureaucratic.²⁰ Therefore, it is crucial that all aspects of MBKM regulations especially the integration of the academic information system (*SIKAD*) and funding mechanisms are clearly defined and operational. Only then can MBKM be implemented effectively.

The implementation of MBKM activities at UIN Ar-Raniry is highly anticipated by students, as it provides opportunities to engage with the professional world, accelerate their academic progress, and develop practical skills that are not typically acquired through conventional classroom learning.²¹ Moreover, when MBKM is implemented in the form of *KPM*, it can offer students the chance to apply their knowledge, technology, and skills through collaboration with multiple stakeholders. Additionally, MBKM can support rural development efforts in partnership with the Ministry of Villages, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and other third-party organizations.

While the implementation of the MBKM program offers valuable opportunities for students, it also inevitably presents various challenges and obstacles. One of the primary issues is the lack of comprehensive understanding regarding the technical aspects of MBKM implementation, which has led to difficulties in its execution. Academic departments are therefore required to exert extra effort and demonstrate a serious commitment, particularly in building connections with the business and industrial sectors (*Dunia Usaha dan Dunia Industri*, or DUDI).²² A curriculum that integrates the needs of the DUDI sectors emphasizes key performance indicators such as graduates' readiness to become entrepreneurs. Accordingly, students must be adequately equipped with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills. Without structured entrepreneurship education, students are unlikely to possess the competencies needed to enter or create new business ventures. Developing a curriculum that integrates entrepreneurship and DUDI involvement requires a well-designed structure, supported by qualified and certified faculty. The capacity of lecturers in the areas of entrepreneurship and practical business skills is essential for designing a curriculum that aligns with the MBKM

¹⁹Wawancara dengan Warek 1 UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh Pada Tanggal 14 Juli 2023

²⁰Wawancara dengan Wadep III Fuf yang pada sebelumnya sebagai Ketua Prodi SAA tanggal 15 Juli 2023

²¹Wawancara dengan Warek I UIN Ar-Raniry Pada tanggal 14 Juli 2023

²²Wawancara dengan Warek 1 UIN Ar-Raniry Pada tanggal 14 Juli 2023

goals, especially in its implementation through *PKKM* (Competitive Grant Program for Independent Campus).

3. Implementation of The MBKM Program at UIN Sumatera Utara Medan

The rapid advancement of information and communication technology—alongside dynamic shifts in social, cultural, and economic landscapes, particularly within the industrial and professional sectors demands a more open and flexible approach to higher education. In response to these developments, UIN Sumatera Utara has committed to granting students greater academic freedom and broader learning opportunities, extending beyond the internal scope of their study programs or home institution. The MBKM program represents a strategic initiative in transforming the existing learning system. It is designed to facilitate students' holistic development by enhancing their potential and capacities to become excellent, creative, innovative, and competitive individuals. In support of this transformation, the National Library Development Center of the Republic of Indonesia, in collaboration with the UIN Sumatera Utara Library, has taken responsibility for fostering academic library advancement across Islamic Higher Education Institutions (*Perguruan Tinggi Islam*). One notable initiative was the organization of a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) focused on developing **Scientific Competition Guidelines for the Implementation of Information Literacy** in support of the *Kampus Merdeka* policy.²³

Opportunities and challenges in the implementation of the *Kampus Merdeka* and *Merdeka Belajar* curriculum have encouraged policymakers (university leadership) to restructure and redesign curricula that support the effective realization of these programs. It is hoped that various activities carried out at the university, faculty, and department levels at UINSU will enrich and deepen institutional understanding of curriculum design, allowing for its optimal implementation. Referring to the existing regulations issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture, there are at least eight *Kampus Merdeka* activities that higher education institutions can implement as part of the *Kampus Merdeka* and *Merdeka Belajar* policy: student exchange, internship/work placement, teaching assistance in educational units, research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurship programs, independent study or projects, and village development. These activities have already been implemented in several universities. UINSU has conducted several *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* workshops, which so far have been carried out by each faculty based on a circular issued by the previous Rector.²⁴ For instance,

²³Kegiatan FGD ini telah dilaksanakan pada Rabu-Kamis, 20-21 Desember 2022 di Hotel Harris Jakarta, melibatkan berbagai *stakeholders* terkait, baik unsur swasta maupun pemerintah

²⁴ Wawancara dengan Pimpinan Sumatera Utara UINSU Medan pada tanggal 06 Juli 2023

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the Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business organized the first such workshop within UINSU on July 2, 2022.

Although the implementation of MBKM at UINSU has not yet been fully realized, the former Rector expressed full support and readiness to implement the program. However, this requires thorough preparation, hard work, and strategic coordination. All elements within the university must be informed and aware of how the MBKM program is to be carried out.²⁵ Maraimbang also stated that the MBKM²⁶ program implemented within PTKIN must be carefully aligned with study programs and faculties that are capable of developing alumni skills relevant to the program's objectives.

In support of the MBKM Program, UIN Sumatera Utara consistently strives to disseminate information about the program to all relevant parties, particularly to study programs and faculties. These academic units are expected to independently understand and implement the stages of MBKM. The policy stages are generally categorized into three phases: normative, empirical, and evaluative. According to this view, the Rector's circular regarding MBKM remains within the normative level and has not yet progressed into empirical planning, let alone the evaluative stage. According to Candra, there are at least two essential actions that must be taken in the implementation of MBKM policies²⁷:

1. **Redesigning the university curriculum**, including determining the number of courses that can be taken across faculties or study programs with equivalent accreditation, framed within the nine MBKM activity models.
2. **The university must prepare operational standards** such as standard operating procedures (SOPs), quality manuals, credit conversion systems, and other technical guidelines. In addition, the university, together with faculties and departments, should expand collaborations with relevant institutions for instance, the Faculty of Education (Tarbiyyah) should seek partnerships beyond the formal education sector.

Beyond these activities, UINSU has also implemented a Human Resource Development Program. During one of these events, Firman, one of the keynote speakers, discussed student-led school digitalization programs and the digital transformation of MSMEs. These initiatives

²⁵ Wawancara dengan Pimpinan Sumatera Utara UINSU Medan pada tanggal 06 Juli 2023

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align with the *Kampus Merdeka* and *Merdeka Belajar* policies launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture. He also emphasized the policy granting students the right to study for three semesters outside their home study programs one of the key aspects of the MBKM framework. Firman highlighted the importance of inter-university cooperation agreements, as such documentation is a crucial indicator for MBKM implementation.

UIN Sumatera Utara has also established partnerships with banking institutions to support the implementation of the KKNI-based curriculum aligned with MBKM. This collaboration was marked by the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Memorandum of Agreement (MoA), held in the UISU multipurpose hall. Yanhar Jamaluddin stated that UISU is currently undergoing an institutional development program, including the implementation of the KKNI-based MBKM curriculum, as mandated by the government. One key aspect is providing students with the opportunity to study outside their primary study programs and to participate in industry-based training according to their areas of expertise. The MoU was signed to facilitate and support MBKM activities, particularly in the context of student internships and training programs.

The collaboration established is not merely ceremonial, as marked by a memorandum of understanding, but is expected to be implemented effectively. The leadership of UINSU places significant emphasis on the development of student entrepreneurship. This concern stems from the fact that UINSU students have successfully won several entrepreneurship competitions organized by the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, receiving funding support for their initiatives. However, there is a need to consider the sustainability of these entrepreneurial programs, which have already received government recognition. Therefore, the university hopes that banking institutions, especially Bank Sumut, can assist in further developing and following up on the entrepreneurial initiatives pioneered by students.

Students are now entering a more challenging environment, while also gaining broader opportunities to fulfill their roles as learners within the *Kampus Merdeka* era, under the *Merdeka Belajar* policy initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia. Within this policy framework, students are given the opportunity to acquire knowledge not only through classroom-based learning but also through a range of programs conducted beyond the campus setting. These include options such as taking courses and engaging in student exchanges across study programs within the same university; exchanges within the same study program across different universities; and exchanges between different study programs across different universities. In addition, this policy encompasses internships

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or work placements, teaching assistance in educational units, research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurship activities, independent study or projects, and village development or thematic community service programs (*Kuliah Kerja Nyata*). Within this context, student organizations are expected to synergize effectively with university management. Alwi Nazri Srg and Ardiansyah Putra Pulungan have expressed their commitment to supporting and advancing the university's *Tridharma* (three pillars of higher education) mission optimally. They also conveyed their pride in being part of a new campus equipped with international-standard facilities and laboratories.²⁸

In accordance with its regulations, the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy is implemented through curriculum design that serves as a framework for recognizing students' independent learning processes, activities, and experiences. The autonomy granted to students in choosing learning activities is structured to align with the intended learning outcomes that have been formally outlined. Referring to this policy, Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 3 of 2020 stipulates that higher education institutions are required to provide students with the right on a voluntary basis (i.e., not mandatory) to engage in learning activities outside their home university, including the option of studying for one semester outside their study program but within the same university. The MBKM policy offers students the opportunity to gain broader learning experiences and acquire new competencies through various forms of educational activities.²⁹ In addition, students are also granted the freedom to take part in study activities outside of their own program of study, within the same university, with a specific credit load. All such activities are to be undertaken under the guidance and supervision of academic advisors or faculty members. As reported by *SerambiNews.com* on July 7, the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* regulation is carried out by preparing the curriculum to function as a platform for recognizing students' independent learning. The freedom in learning is structured according to the promised Learning Outcomes. The implementation of MBKM is thus realized through curriculum development that facilitates the recognition of student-driven learning, regulated in line with the predetermined outcomes.

4. Implementation of MBKM at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang

UIN Imam Bonjol Padang is a higher education institution that carries out its duties, functions, and roles in accordance with the mandate of the Higher Education Law No. 12 of 2012 and other relevant regulations, particularly in implementing the *Tri Dharma* of Higher

²⁸ Wawancara Dengan Alwi Nazri salah seorang Dosen UINSU pada tanggal 6 Juli 2023

²⁹ Wawancara dengan Wadek 3 UINSU pada tanggal 6 Juli 2023

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Education. This mandate aims to promote a prosperous and intellectually enriched national life, to foster a religious society with excellent character, broad insight, practical skills, and the competence to face future challenges, while also building a society capable of adapting to rapid, dynamic, and disruptive changes.

In response to these fast-paced, diverse, and disruptive transformations, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang is expected to develop innovative, creative, collaborative, and adaptive learning models as a platform to cultivate students' abilities in critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, and the development of emotional intelligence with a service-oriented and adaptable mindset. Consequently, UIN Imam Bonjol is continuously required to advance its curriculum and learning models in order to achieve relevant and optimal graduate learning outcomes in terms of values and attitudes, knowledge, and skills aligned with the demands of 21st-century competencies.

Facing such opportunities and challenges, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang embraces the MBKM policy as one of the strategic responses for enhancing the autonomy and relevance of higher education in line with current social dynamics and the needs of the industrial and professional sectors. One of the key components of the MBKM policy is the implementation of the "three semesters outside the study program" learning rights. Through this policy, students are given the opportunity to engage in learning experiences beyond their study program, thereby fostering a flexible and autonomous learning model aligned with each student's individual talents and academic aspirations.³⁰

This learning culture is developed creatively and innovatively, based on students' interests, needs, and orientations throughout their undergraduate studies at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. The university consistently provides facilities and space for independent learning, allowing students to select various courses and activities that serve as supporting instruments for achieving both core and additional graduate competencies.³¹ An existing set of guidelines serves as the technical and operational reference for implementing the MBKM policy in accordance with the Ministry of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3 of 2020 concerning the National Standards for Higher Education, particularly in realizing students' rights at UIN Imam Bonjol Padang to study outside of their home program for three semesters. The SAA Study Program at UIN Imam Bonjol plans to implement this policy in the upcoming even

³⁰ UIN Imam Bojol, "Keputusan Rektor UIN Imam Bonjol Padang Nomor 1975 Tahun 2022 Tentang Pedoman Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka UIN Imam Bonjol," 2022. Samsudi, Suprpto, E., Utanto, Y., Rohman, S., & Djafar, T. (2024). Unraveling The Merdeka Curriculum: Exploring Differentiated Instruction's Impact On Student Learning. *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 12(2), 517-538.

³¹ Wawancara dengan Serektarsis Prodi SAA UIN Imam Bonjol Padang via Online

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semester of the 2023–2024 academic year. In previous semesters, following the issuance of the Rector's regulation, the faculty had already initiated several activities and allocated funding in the RKAKL (Work Plan and Budget) to support MBKM initiatives. Furthermore, curriculum workshops and collaborative efforts have been conducted with other study programs within UIN Imam Bonjol, other Islamic universities (UINs), as well as with government and private institutions.³²

5. Implications for The Development of Islamic Sciences

The implementation of the MBKM (Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka) Program at UIN Ar-Raniry, UINSU Medan, and UIN Imam Bonjol represents a significant effort to enhance the quality of higher education. Intellectual development both in conceptual aspects and practical skills across various scientific disciplines can be greatly enhanced through the MBKM program, including in the field of Islamic sciences. This is particularly important since Islamic sciences constitute the core discipline in the academic mission of Islamic higher education institutions.

According to Amin Abdullah, the development of Islamic sciences remains relatively stagnant due to its dominant reliance on literalist Islamic traditions that are assumed to be universally applicable. Many Islamic studies in both Western and Middle Eastern academic contexts continue to be based on classical Islamic texts rooted in specific historical and social contexts, which are often treated as timeless and universal.³³ From the perspective of the philosophy of science, scientific development should aim toward the *context of discovery*, not be limited to the *context of justification*.³⁴ Without producing new discoveries (novelties) in response to contemporary changes and challenges, a discipline will fail to evolve in a progressive direction.

The implementation of the MBKM program in Islamic higher education institutions is also expected to address the long-standing dichotomy between religious and non-religious sciences. Scholars in disciplines such as biology, chemistry, physics, sociology, and psychology typically do not base their research on verses from the Qur'an. Conversely, many scholars of

³² Wawancara dengan Sekretaris Prodi SAA UIN Imam Bonjol Padang via online

³³ M. Amin Abdullah, *Studi Agama* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1996), 109.

³⁴ Koento Wibisono, *Filsafat Ilmu: Sebagai Dasar Pengembangan Ilmu Pengetahuan* (Yogyakarta: LP3 UGM & INtan Pariwara (Klaten), 1997), 8. Barkah, Q., Chalidi, C., Rochmiyatun, S., Asmowati, S., & Fernando, H. (2023). The Manipulation of Religion and The Legalization of Underage Marriages in Indonesia. *Samarah*, 7(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.22373/sjhk.v7i1.13316>

the Qur'an and Hadith often focus solely on textual analysis, without engaging in deeper scientific explorations of God's creation as encouraged by the Qur'an itself.³⁵

Therefore, the development of Islamic sciences and their integration with other scientific disciplines is a vital mission within the MBKM framework at Islamic universities. All strategies, policies, and elements of the MBKM program must actively involve Islamic sciences. In this way, the development of Islamic sciences through MBKM will not only affirm but also strengthen the existence and advancement of Islamic higher education institutions and vice versa.

C. Conclusion

The *Kampus Merdeka* (Independent Campus) policy represents a model of autonomous and flexible higher education learning, fostering an innovative learning culture that is non-restrictive and tailored to student needs. The MBKM program facilitates the establishment of new study programs, changes in the accreditation system of higher education institutions, the transformation of public universities into legal entities, and the right for students to study for three semesters outside their study programs. Students are granted the freedom to take credits outside their study program, with the three-semester opportunity comprising one semester of coursework outside their study program and two semesters of learning activities outside their home university.

The three universities examined in this study UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, UIN Sumatera Utara Medan, and UIN Imam Bonjol Padang have not yet fully implemented the MBKM program in accordance with the Ministry of Higher Education's policy.

Since 2021, UIN Ar-Raniry has developed MBKM guidelines through Rector's Decree No. 33 of 2021 concerning the Implementation Guidelines of MBKM. To date, UIN Ar-Raniry has carried out several MBKM-related activities, including socialization to faculty leaders and study programs, cooperation with relevant institutions, and student internship programs.

UIN Sumatera Utara consistently strives to promote the MBKM Program to all parties, especially study programs and faculties. Each program is expected to independently carry out the stages of understanding MBKM. The policy implementation passes through three phases: Normative, Empirical, and Evaluative. According to the evaluation, the circular issued by the Rector concerning MBKM is still at the normative level and has not yet entered the empirical

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planning stage, let alone the evaluative one. Although the implementation guidebook is already available, the study programs and faculties have yet to carry out any substantial activities.

In implementing the MBKM Program, UIN Imam Bonjol is expected to continuously develop its curriculum and learning models that can achieve relevant and optimal learning outcomes, integrating attitudes and values, knowledge, and skills in line with the dynamics and demands of 21st-century competencies. Responding to the opportunities and challenges mentioned above, UIN Imam Bonjol Padang has welcomed the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy as one of the strategic answers in organizing and managing higher education in a more autonomous, innovative, productive, adaptive, and relevant way to social dynamics, scientific and technological advancements, and the needs of industry and the labor market.

UIN Ar-Raniry, UINSU Medan, and UIN Imam Bonjol Padang have all formulated MBKM regulations or guidelines and carried out collaborations with external parties, student internship programs, workshops, and curriculum revisions, as implemented by UIN Imam Bonjol Padang. In other words, the MBKM Program has not yet been fully implemented as intended, except for certain activities carried out on a limited scale.

Nevertheless, the MBKM Program at these three Islamic universities must prioritize the integration of Islamic sciences in its implementation. Beyond being part of the university curriculum, Islamic sciences are a core domain that affirms the identity of UIN as an Islamic higher education institution.

Therefore, the development of Islamic sciences is one of the key missions of the MBKM Program at Islamic Higher Education Institutions. All strategies, policies, and components of the MBKM Program that have been launched must involve Islamic sciences. Accordingly, the development of Islamic sciences through the MBKM Program will not only affirm but also strengthen the existence and advancement of Islamic Higher Education Institutions, just as the growth of these institutions will further support the development of Islamic sciences.

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