MBKM Implementation and Its Influence on Graduate Competence at State Islamic Higher Education Institutions

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The Indonesian government launched the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program that offers students diverse learning opportunities beyond the classroom. This study aims to investigate the implementation of the MBKM program in State Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Aceh. The study utilized a qualitative case study research method, conducted at three PTKINs in Aceh. It involved UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, IAIN Lhokseumawe, and IAIN Langsa. Data were collected through observations and interviews and then analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that implementing the MBKM program includes curriculum integration, experiential learning, student mobility, community service, research, and digital platforms. Efforts to achieve these involve partnerships, curriculum reform, digital innovation, faculty capacity building, experiential learning, and a quality assurance mechanism. Further, the success factors comprise institutional synergy, effective socialization, well-defined policies, adequate resource allocation, and student motivation. Conversely, the implementation faces challenges such as insufficient data reporting and inconsistent credit recognition. Given the study's limited scope, future studies should broaden their focus to enhance generalizability and explore institution-specific challenges in greater depth.

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How to Cite:
Saiful, Silahuddin, and Raihan Fadhilah. "MBKM Implementation and Its Influence on Graduate Competence at State Islamic Higher Education Institutions." *Cendekia: Jurnal Kependidikan dan Kemasyarakatan* 23, No. 1 (2025): 159-171. https://doi.org/10.21154/cendekia.v23i1.10549.

INTRODUCTION

Rapid advancements in information technology are changing all facets of life. As new types of employment arise, traditional positions evolve, resulting in substantial changes in how people work.[1] Higher education institutions must provide high-quality education while adapting quickly to changing circumstances. To produce successful graduates, educational institutions must create models that equip students with relevant skills and prepare them to compete in the contemporary workforce.[2] Moreover, information technology developments necessitate educational institutions to incorporate innovative learning approaches that correspond with industry needs.[3]

Higher education has yet to consistently produce graduates with abilities that meet the needs of today's job market.[4] Therefore, universities must purposefully construct innovative educational programs that provide students with the proper competencies to navigate and flourish in a globalized employment landscape.[5] Universities should also serve as a source of culture and creativity, encouraging the development of knowledge, traits, and skills necessary for students' personal and professional development.[6] The following graph outlines today's job market dynamics for future university graduates.
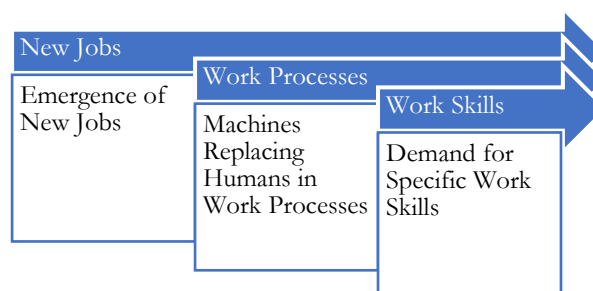

Figure 1. Job Market Dynamics

As seen in Figure 1, technology and machine-driven processes are progressively replacing human workers in specific sectors. This shift requires graduates to acquire more than just theoretical expertise, as they must also have optimal skills to thrive in a workforce where human roles are shifting.[7] Without such essential abilities, graduates will face serious

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[1] Thibaud Deruelle, Andrey Ugarte Montero, and Joël Wagner, "The Impact of Technological Progress on the Future of Work: Insights from A Survey on Alternative Employment Contracts in OECD Countries," *Journal of the Knowledge Economy* 15, (2024): 16345–16372, https://doi.org/10.1007/s13132-024-01733-2.

[2] Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia Direktorat Pendidikan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, *Panduan Implementasi MBKM Dalam Kurikulum Prodi Pada Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam* (Jakarta: Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia, 2020).

[3] Vera G. Goulart, Lara Bartocci Liboni, and Luciana Oranges Cezarino, "Balancing Skills in the Digital Transformation Era: The Future of Jobs and the Role of Higher Education," *Industry and Higher Education* 36, no. 2 (2022): 118–27, doi:10.1177/09504222211029796.

[4] Ugochukwu Chinonso Okolie, Hyginus Emeka Nwosu, and Sunday Mlanga, "Graduate Employability: How the Higher Education Institutions Can Meet the Demand of the Labour Market," *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning* 9, no. 4 (2019): 620-636, https://doi: 10.1108/HESWBL-09-2018-0089.

[5] Hong T.M. Bui and Hoa T. M. Nguyen, "Higher Education, Innovation and Employability," in *Innovate Higher Education to Enhance Graduate Employability* (England: Routledge, 2019): 1–8.

[6] Emilia Filippi, Mariasole Bannò, and Sandro Trento, "Automation Technologies and Their Impact on Employment: A Review, Synthesis and Future Research Agenda," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 191, (2023): 122-448, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2023.122448.

[7] Bui and Nguyen, "Higher Education, Innovation and Employability," 1-8.

obstacles in securing and performing effectively in the competitive job market.

In light of this, Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture Regulations No. 3 of 2020 offers a crucial opportunity through the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) or "Freedom to Learn-Independent Campus" initiative.[8] This regulation allows students to improve their competence and skills by allowing them to study for three semesters outside their regular curriculum.[9] Students can better prepare for the demands of the professional world by participating in MBKM, which offers them practical experience and essential knowledge related to their respective disciplines.[10] The MBKM allows students to move beyond the confines of the typical school environment. It encourages students to participate in real-world activities within corporations, government organizations, research centers, and local communities.[11]

The MBKM initiative provides students with significant hands-on experience through eight learning activities, including internship/work practice, student exchange, teaching in education units, research, independent study, entrepreneurial activities, humanitarian projects, and village building/KKN (community service).[12] These programs aim to strengthen hard and soft skills, leading to highly competent graduates prepared for many industries.[13] The MBKM policy effectively corresponds to the critical requirement to enhance the competency of university graduates.[14] This curriculum represents an essential learning innovation that promotes high-quality education and develops competent individuals with strong character.[15]

In Aceh, preliminary observations indicate that State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKINs) such as UIN Ar-Raniry, IAIN Lhokseumawe, and IAIN Langsa have already adopted the MBKM program, with each institution establishing its own guiding rules for implementation. With this context, a more extensive investigation is needed to examine some key aspects of the MBKM implementation in Aceh: (1) How is MBKM implemented to improve graduate competence at the PTKINs in Aceh? (2) What efforts are made by the PTKINs in Aceh to implement MBKM and enhance graduate competence, and (3) What are the success factors and hindering factors in implementing MBKM to boost graduate competence at the PTKINs in Aceh?

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[8] Denny Kodrat, "Mindset Mutu Manajemen Perguruan Tinggi Islam Dalam Program Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM), *Al-Mujaddid: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Agama* 3, no. 1 (2021): 48–61, https://doi.org/10.51482/almujaddid.v3i1.48.

[9] Direktorat Pendidikan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, *Panduan Implementasi*, (2020).

[10] Abunawas Tjaija, "Implementation of 'Freedom to Learn, Independent Campus' (MBKM) Policy," *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan* 14, no. 1 (2022): 319-328, https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v14i1.2115.

[11] Fridiyanto et al., *Merdeka Belajar Dan Kampus Merdeka* (Malang: Literasi Nusantara Abadi, 2022), 99.

[12] Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Islam Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia Direktorat Pendidikan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, *Panduan Implementasi*, (2020).

[13] Candra Nugraha Wati et al., "Kolaborasi Perguruan Tinggi dan Industri Dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)," *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Pascasarjana* 5, no. 1 (2022): 202-207.

[14] Kardiyem, Mansyur Arsyad, and Siti Mukoyimah, "Merdeka Belajar dan Kampus Merdeka: Kajian Filsafat Pendidikan Barat Dan Timur Serta Realitasnya," *Jurnal Filsafat Indonesia* 6, no. 2 (2023): 291-302, https://doi.org/10.23887/jfi.v6i2.57668.

[15] Deni Sopiansyah et al., "Konsep dan Implementasi Kurikulum MBKM (Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka)," *Reslaj: Religion Education Social Laa Roiba Journal* 4, no. 1 (2022): 34-41, https://doi.org/10.47467/reslaj.v4i1.458.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research approach.[16] In particular, a qualitative case study research method was used to explore extensive data collected from several sources to examine an actual, contemporary bounded system (a 'case') across time.[17] This study centered on three Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIN) in Aceh, i.e., UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, IAIN Langsa, and IAIN Lhokseumawe, which formed a clear boundary for the case. These institutions were selected with consideration for their commitment to providing quality education and active involvement in the MBKM program.

Data collection primarily involved direct observation and interviews.[18] The observational component included on-site visits to each university, during which researchers engaged with the academic environment and examined the program's application in practice. In addition to observation, semi-structured interviews were held with key individuals involved in the MBKM program. The participants were affiliated with the PGMI (Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah/Islamic Elementary Teacher Education), PTE (Pendidikan Teknik Elektro/Electrical Engineering Education), PFS (Perbankan Syariah/Sharia Banking) study programs, as well as the FTIK (Fakultas Tarbiyah dan Ilmu Keguruan/Faculty of Education and Teacher Training) at IAIN Langsa and academic staff from IAIN Lhokseumawe. These participants were selected due to their strategic responsibilities in the MBKM program planning, coordination, and execution. All participants were briefed on the objective and scope of the study before the interviews, and their informed consent was acquired. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to protect their identities and professional integrity, and participation was voluntary.

The data from observation and interview were then analyzed using a thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns.[19] Thematic analysis provides a flexible yet thorough approach to compare findings across the three PTKINs while considering each institution's different environment. This qualitative study helps the researchers investigate the institutional dynamics, challenges, and successes of MBKM in Aceh's socio-educational setting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the MBKM program at UIN Ar-Raniry, IAIN Lhokseumawe, and IAIN Langsa has portrayed a planned approach to improving student capabilities through experiential and interdisciplinary learning. The following thematic discussions describe key aspects of MBKM implementation towards improving graduate competence, efforts made by these institutions to support the MBKM program, and factors underlying the success and hindrance of MBKM implementation, supported by relevant academic

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[16] Hossein Nassaji, "Qualitative and Descriptive Research: Data Type versus Data Analysis," *Language Teaching Research* 19, no. 2 (2015): 129-132, https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168815572747.

[17] John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2017).

[18] Elaine Denny and Annalise Weckesser, "How to Do Qualitative Research? Qualitative Research Methods," *BJOG: An International Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology* 129, no. 7 (2022): 1166-1167, https://doi.org/10.1111/1471-0528.17150.

[19] Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Thematic Analysis," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2017): 297-298, https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613.

studies.

MBKM Implementation for Graduate Competence

1. Curriculum Integration and Institutional Planning

These three institutions have integrated MBKM into their academic framework through systematic planning and policy development. UIN Ar-Raniry has created MBKM guidelines since 2021, aided by socialization campaigns, formal Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs), and curriculum design and course equivalency procedures. IAIN Lhokseumawe has utilized the MERPATI platform to encourage cross-institutional collaboration, while IAIN Langsa has promoted cross-disciplinary and value-based education. This is consistent with the findings of Hartono et al., which pointed out that MBKM adoption greatly influences curriculum and learning models, prompting contextual learning strategies.[20]

2. Experiential Learning through Internships and On-the-Job Training (OJT)

Internships and On-the-Job Training (OJT) are essential to the MBKM program because they offer students real-world experience. UIN Ar-Raniry has provided domestic and foreign internship opportunities, including assignments at the Indonesian Embassy in Bangkok and the Indonesian Parliament (DPR RI). IAIN Lhokseumawe has offered internships in various industries in Aceh and North Sumatra, which are preceded by structured OJT sessions and guided by institutional mentors. IAIN Langsa has worked with institutions such as OIF, UMSU, and the Langsa Sharia Court to instill student discipline, teamwork, and workplace preparedness. Such practices align with the findings of Thohiriyah et al., who highlighted the relevance of internships in supporting MBKM curriculum success.[21]

3. Field Experience, Practice, and School-Based Experience

Field Experience Practice (*Praktik Pengalaman Lapangan/PPL*) and Teaching Campus (*Kampus Mengajar*) have been crucial to MBKM implementation. UIN Ar-Raniry has an integrated teaching and community service program (PPK-PKM), offered nationally and internationally, providing credit recognition and performance assessments from host schools and community leaders. IAIN Lhokseumawe has organized PPL for 82 educational institutions, focusing on teaching approaches and professional conduct. IAIN Langsa has concentrated on teaching skills, character education, spiritual development, and critical thinking. These programs correspond with the objectives of MBKM to improve educational quality through practical learning experiences.[22]

4. Student Mobility and Exchange Programs

Student exchange programs help widen students' intellectual horizons and cultural

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[20] Heny Hartono et al., "The Implementation of MBKM Policy and Its Impact on the Curriculum and Learning Model," *Celt: A Journal of Culture, English Language Teaching & Literature* 22, No. 1 (2022): 25-38, doi: 10.24167/celt.v22i1.4246.

[21] Thohiriyah et al., "Promoting Success for MBKM-Curriculum through Internship Program in Higher Education," *Proceedings of International Conference on Science, Education, and Technology* 9, no. 1 (2023): 746-757.

[22] Teguh Trianung et al., "Implementation of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program in Improving the Quality of Education in Indonesia," *VISI : Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidik dan Tenaga Kependidikan Pendidikan Non Formal* 19, no. 1 (2024): 10-22. https://doi.org/10.21009/JIV.1901.2.

understanding. UIN Ar-Raniry has promoted domestic and international mobility, such as dual degree programs with Universiti Utara Malaysia and academic exchanges with German universities under DAAD arrangements. IAIN Lhokseumawe and IAIN Langsa have utilized the MERPATI platform for online exchanges, which help expose students to various academic cultures and teaching approaches. These findings align with the findings of Dewi et al. that MBKM programs promote cultural and citizenship literacy among pre-service teachers, highlighting how such programs contribute to the development of global perspectives and academic adaptability.[23]

5. Community Service and Social Engagement

Community engagement is another essential component of MBKM. In this regard, UIN Ar-Raniry has supported national and international community service activities, including commitments with the Hayrat Foundation in Turkey. IAIN Lhokseumawe has operated national (*KKN Nusantara*) and international (*KKN Serumpun*) community service programs. These community programs seek to integrate Islamic knowledge in real-life situations, foster participation in the community, and promote local development. To this end, Sirait et al. have reiterated the importance of including local wisdom in MBKM activities, which underlines the significance of connecting academic programs with community needs.[24]

6. Research Integration and Scientific Publication

UIN Ar-Raniry has incorporated research into MBKM in an innovative approach, as the university permits students to substitute a thesis with publications in SINTA-accredited journals. Research activities have partnered with external research centers, emphasizing improving students' analytical and methodological skills. However, IAIN Lhokseumawe and IAIN Langsa have not conducted distinct research-themed MBKM programs, suggesting potential areas for future expansion. This research approach correlates with the findings of Anggara, who observed that MBKM regulations enhance autonomy and creativity in higher education institutions.[25]

7. Utilization of Digital Platforms

The three PTKINs have used the MERPATI platform, which was developed by the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag RI), to facilitate online learning, academic mobility, and joint MBKM programs across PTKINs. This digital platform has assisted in efficient cross-institutional exchange and credit transfers, which help promote MBKM's learning objectives. Fauziah and Eriherdiana reinforce this, underscoring the significance of precise planning, synergy, and regulations in adopting MBKM, which outlines the role of digital platforms in improving educational quality.[26]

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[23] Silvi Listia Dewi et al., "Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) to Strengthen the Culture and Citizenship Literacy of EFL Pre-Service Teachers," *Studies in English Language and Education* 10, no. 3 (2023): 1270-1289, https://doi.org/10.24815/siele.v10i3.28596.

[24] Selasi Sirait, Nenni Triana Sinaga, and Christina Natalina Saragi, "The Role of Modul Nusantara Subject in Increasing the Values of Local Wisdom of PMM Students Program," *Innovative: Journal of Social Science Research* 3, no. 3 (2023): 2493-2506, https://doi.org/10.31004/innovative.v3i3.2410.

[25] Sahya Anggara, "Exploring the Effectiveness of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Policy in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions: An In-Depth Case Study Analysis," *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan* 15, no. 2 (2023): 1563-1570, https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v15i2.3885.

[26] Meli Fauziah and Mohammad Eriherdiana, "Improving Educational Quality Through the

The above findings reveal a comprehensive and uniform approach to MBKM implementation in all three universities, each customizing the program to its academic and cultural contexts. In this case, UIN Ar-Raniry has demonstrated substantial integration in research and internationalization, whilst IAIN Lhokseumawe and IAIN Langsa have showcased excellent execution in internships and community participation. Nevertheless, these universities should extend collaboration and benchmarking with other parties to increase MBKM outcomes and sustainability.[27]

Efforts to Support MBKM Implementation for Graduate Competence

1. Strategic Partnerships and Institutional Collaboration

    All three institutions have actively explored domestic and international collaborations to support MBKM implementation. UIN Ar-Raniry has partnered with Kemenag of Aceh Province and overseas universities such as Zarqa University in Jordan and Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia. IAIN Lhokseumawe has collaborated with UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim in Malang to study best practices in academic governance, while IAIN Langsa has formed partnerships with various provincial higher education institutions. Such collaborations have benefited these PTKINs in Aceh, enabling resource sharing, curriculum development, and student mobility. Thus, it signifies the necessity of inter-institutional cooperation in improving educational quality.[28]

2. Curriculum Reform and Academic Flexibility

    The attempts to link courses with MBKM notions are visible across these three PTKINs. UIN Ar-Raniry has held workshops that led to the development of MBKM implementation guidelines and curriculum adjustments. In 2023, IAIN Lhokseumawe created an MBKM-oriented curriculum emphasizing flexibility and preference for students, which was supported by a specialist curriculum team. IAIN Langsa has established its MBKM-aligned curriculum through an organized approach, allowing students to acquire credits outside their major or institution. Such changes are made to give students expanded learning opportunities and conform to the national plans for higher education transformation.[29]

3. Digital Innovation and Utilization of Learning Platforms

    The three PTKINs have utilized digital platforms, i.e., MERPATI, to facilitate their MBKM activities. UIN Ar-Raniry has used the MERPATI application to aid program management and lecturer-student interaction. IAIN Lhokseumawe and IAIN Langsa have also applied MERPATI to enhance digital collaboration and virtual student mobility. Integrating digital technologies helps create a digital transformation of learning in Islamic

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Implementation of Learning Planning in the MBKM Context," *Khazanah Pendidikan Islam* 5, no. 3 (2023): 168-179, https://doi.org/10.15575/kp.v5i3.34404.

[27] Eko Purwanti, "Preparing the Implementation of Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka Policy in Higher Education Institutions," *4th International Conference on Sustainable Innovation 2020–Social, Humanity, and Education (ICoSIHESS 2020),* (2021): 384-391, https://doi.org/0.2991/assehr.k.210120.149.

[28] Purwanti, "Preparing the Implementation of Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka Policy in Higher Education Institutions," 384-391.

[29] Humiras Betty Marlina Sihombing and Jelita Panjaitan, "Challenges in Implementing the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka in Higher Education," *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research* 4, no. 8 (2023): 2716-2723, http://doi.org: 10.11594/ijmaber.04.08.04.

higher education institutions.[30]

4. Faculty Development and Stakeholder Engagement

To support the successful implementation of MBKM, these three PTKINs have invested in faculty development and stakeholder engagement. UIN Ar-Raniry has coordinated workshops for academic leaders and curriculum stakeholders, while IAIN Lhokseumawe has organized faculty and student training, created instructional materials, and developed assessment rubrics. IAIN Langsa has also held workshops and evaluations to help with curriculum development. Such efforts show that educators and stakeholders must be fully prepared with the pedagogical changes required by MBKM.[31]

5. Experiential Learning and Student-Centered Approaches

The three PTKINs have greatly emphasized experiential learning activities such as student exchange programs, field practice programs (PPL), internships, and community service. UIN Ar-Raniry has facilitated several practical field programs, comprising moral and technical training before field placement. Similar initiatives have also been carried out by IAIN Lhokseumawe and IAIN Langsa, which support student-centered learning paradigms that foster independence, creativity, and critical thinking. These strategies support MBKM's goal of improving students' practical knowledge and flexibility in real-life scenarios.[32]

6. Regular Evaluation and Quality Assurance

To support MBKM activities, the PTKINs have carried out regular evaluations and quality assurance measures. IAIN Lhokseumawe and IAIN Langsa have conducted routine assessments to monitor MBKM implementation effectiveness and link curriculum development with learning outcomes. UIN Ar-Raniry, through its quality assurance body (LPM), has supervised MBKM curriculum revisions and implementation guides. By carrying out these practices, the universities have ensured that their respective MBKM activities meet educational standards and contribute to continuous improvement.[33]

Factors Influencing MBKM Implementation and Graduate Competency

The success of the MBKM program at three PTKINs in Aceh relies on several essential factors, ranging from institutional support to student engagement. The first factor is institutional synergy and cross-sector collaboration. Effective collaboration with external stakeholders, such as industries, NGOs, and other higher education institutions, is critical for creating authentic learning environments and maximizing student employability. Similar findings have been illustrated in research emphasizing the need for institutional networks

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[30] Siti Juhairiah, Doddy Yuwono, and Qanaiya Yosheila Kinasih, "Digital Transformation in Islamic Education: Opportunities, Challenges, And Its Impact on Islamic Values," *Journal of Vocational Education and Educational Technology Innovations* 1, no. 1 (2024): 1-6, https://doi.org/10.70074/jveti.v1i1.20.

[31] Susidamaiyanti and Sungkawati Kardi Wahyuningsih, "Implementation of 'Freedom to Learn - Independent Campus,' How Prepared Is English Department in Higher Education?," *LITE: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya* 20, no. 2 (2024): 254-70. https://Doi.Org/10.33633/Lite.V20i2.11480.

[32] Tjaija, "Implementation of 'Freedom to Learn, Independent Campus' (MBKM) Policy," 319-328.

[33] Muchammad Eka Mahmud, Muthia Umi Setyoningrum, and Yusnia Binti Kholifah, "Exploring the Implementation of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka in Indonesian Islamic Universities," *Al-Tanzim: Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam* 8, no. 3 (2024): 830–845, https://doi.org/0.33650/al-tanzim.v8i3.8116.

and collaboration for MBKM success.[34] Another critical factor is program socialization, a necessary means to provide comprehensive program activities for lecturers and students. Proper socialization will ensure that all stakeholders thoroughly know the program's technical aspects, such as procedures, requirements, and objectives. This is consistent with previous research revealing that limited socialization can considerably inhibit MBKM implementation, as a lack of relevant information may hamper effective engagement from students and other key stakeholders.[35] Adequate facilities and financing are also essential factors for the success of MBKM. Its implementation relies heavily on institutional financial support, with annual budgets for activities that include internships, PPL, and community service. Previous research has indicated that financial support and adequate facilities correspond with the extent of MBKM implementation in higher education institutions.[36] Further, providing clear guidelines and policy documents helps guarantee that MBKM programs are executed and evaluated systematically, which is an essential reference for all stakeholders. This observation supports earlier research that highlighted the relevance of clear documentation in establishing policy compliance and alignment across stakeholders. Ultimately, student motivation and interest are indispensable for the success of MBKM. This finding is corroborated by prior research, which concluded that student motivation is a key indicator of learning gains in experiential education programs.[37]

Despite these success factors, the MBKM program implementation at PTKINs in Aceh has also encountered certain hindering factors. A significant challenge is the technical reporting to the national PD-DIKTI (Pangkalan Data Pendidikan Tinggi/Higher Education Database) system, which impedes official recognition and traceability of student accomplishments. Although the MBKM program generally operates well in Aceh, the systematic reporting of student data to PD-Dikti has not been fully optimized. This means the program's implementation is not entirely "eligible" or aligned adequately with the PD-Dikti system. At present, the data on student participation is typically recorded into each institution's internal SIAKAD application. Similar problems have been noted in research on higher education institutions' data reporting to PD-Dikti, which might risk data validity, institutional credibility, and the reliability of student academic records.[38] Another significant issue is inconsistent credit (SKS) recognition among institutions. These PTKINs acknowledge credit conversion for MBKM activities but have yet to award students the maximum of 20 SKS. Therefore, credit recognition is adjusted based on the university's

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[34] Purwanti, "Preparing the Implementation of Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka Policy in Higher Education Institutions," 384-391.

[35] M. Fadli et al., "Barriers and Strategies: Analysis of the Implementation of Independent Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) at PTKI in Aceh," *QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Agama* 16, no. 2 (2024): 1101-1114, https://doi.org/0.37680/qalamuna.v16i2.5730.

[36] Defrizal et al., "Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program: An Analysis of the Success Factors," *Nusantara: Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia* 2, no. 1 (2022): 123-140, https://doi.org/10.14421/njpi.2022.v2i1-8.

[37] Yekhonya Aprausa Sieltiel, Agus Salim, and Qomario, "Pengaruh Pelaksanaan Program MBKM Terhadap Minat Mahasiswa Melalui Motivasi Mahasiswa Teknologi Pendidikan ULM Tahun 2023," *Journal of Education Research* 5, no. 4 (2024): 4466-4472. https://doi.org/10.37985/jer.v5i4.1517.

[38] Hanim Maria Astuti, Radityo Prasetianto Wibowo, and Anisah Herdiyanti, "Towards the National Higher Education Database in Indonesia: Challenges to Data Governance Implementation from The Perspective of a Public University," *Procedia Computer Science,* 234 (2024): 1322-1331, https://10.1016/j.procs.2024.03.130.

respective credit systems. Although students taking part in MBKM could convert their certificates of completion into approved courses by their study programs, the variability in SKS recognition remains a concern.[39]

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study reveals the implementation of MBKM within three PTKIN institutions in Aceh, namely UIN Ar-Raniry, IAIN Lhokseumawe, and IAIN Langsa. It highlights its impact on graduate preparedness through important areas, including curriculum integration, experiential learning, field practice, student mobility, community service, research integration, and digital platform utilization. Furthermore, the efforts of these institutions in executing the MBKM program illustrate an extensive strategy that involves strategic partnerships, curriculum reform, digital innovation, faculty development, experiential learning, and quality assurance. These efforts equip students with the capacities, values, and practical skills to succeed in complex global and professional environments. The successful MBKM program's implementation at these PTKINs is influenced by multifaceted factors, ranging from institutional synergy and cross-sector collaboration, program socialization, adequate facilities and financing, clear guidelines and policy documents, and student motivation and interest. However, structural issues such as inadequate data reporting and inconsistent credit recognition underline the importance of systemic alignment and ongoing policy assistance. Thus, addressing these obstacles is essential to maintaining the transformative influence of the MBKM program. Nevertheless, this study is limited to three Aceh PTKIN institutions and might affect the generalizability of its findings on MBKM implementation and graduate preparedness. Hence, future research should broaden its scope, such as focusing on graduate outcomes and institutional issues, e.g., data reporting and credit recognition, to fully achieve the expected potential of the MBKM program.

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