

The implementation of the Islamic communication science-based *MBKM* curriculum at State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract

The rapid advancement of information and technology has prompted higher education institutions, particularly State Islamic Religious Universities (*PTKINs*), to make precise calculations and analyze potential risks when implementing curricula. The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* policy, introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, aims to prepare students for the challenges of the workforce through quality education. This study, therefore, aims to analyze the implementation of the *MBKM* curriculum in Islamic Communication Studies programs at State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (*PTKIN*), which generally focus on three schemes: *Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka* (Independent Student Exchange), internships, and research. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, collecting data through interviews, observations, and documentation. The study subjects include *PTKIN* leaders, program coordinators, and students from four selected *PTKINs*. Despite facing challenges such as differing understandings of the *MBKM* concept, mismatches between Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL) and industry needs, and limitations in infrastructure, funding, and human resources, the findings indicate that the *MBKM* curriculum has been implemented effectively. These findings are expected to provide valuable insights for the future improvement and optimization of the *MBKM* program.

Keywords:

curriculum implementation;
MBKM; Islamic
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Abstrak

Perkembangan teknologi dan informasi yang pesat mendorong perguruan tinggi, khususnya Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Negeri (*PTKIN*), untuk melakukan perhitungan yang akurat sekaligus menganalisis risiko terburuk yang akan dihadapi dalam implementasi kurikulum. Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) oleh Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset dan Teknologi menjadi solusi untuk menyiapkan mahasiswa menghadapi tantangan dunia kerja melalui pembelajaran yang berkualitas. Sehingga, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi kurikulum MBKM pada Program Studi Komunikasi Islam di *PTKIN* yang rata-rata fokus pada tiga skema, yaitu; Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka, Magang, dan Riset. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data melalui wawancara, observasi, serta dokumentasi. Subjek penelitian melibatkan pimpinan *PTKIN*, pengelola program studi, dan mahasiswa dari empat *PTKIN* terpilih. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa implementasi kurikulum MBKM berjalan dengan baik, meskipun menghadapi kendala seperti perbedaan pemahaman konsep MBKM, ketidaksesuaian Capaian Pembelajaran Lulusan (CPL) dengan kebutuhan industri, serta keterbatasan sarana prasarana, anggaran, dan sumber daya manusia. Temuan ini diharapkan dapat menjadi masukan dalam memperbaiki dan mengoptimalkan program MBKM di masa depan.

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INTRODUCTION

Skills, expertise, and creativity are three key elements in the era of big data. The Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology, must respond by improving the quality of human resources (Junaid & Baharuddin, 2020). The rapid development of technology and information requires universities to make accurate calculations while analyzing the worst risks they may face. Without preventive measurement, the absorption of graduates into the labor force will decrease, leading to an increase in unemployment.

The necessary policy in such a situation is to establish an efficient and effective education system that enables students to master the competencies in their field of

expertise to meet the challenges and needs of the global labor market (Susilawati, 2021). Thus, the national unemployment rate can be reduced through integrated upstream and downstream policies, especially focusing on the qualifications of tertiary graduates and the competencies of the workforce (Arifin & Muslim, 2020). *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* is the response of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to prepare students for higher-quality learning (Widiyono, 2021).

The *MBKM* policy encourages greater autonomy and flexibility in the learning process at universities. In principle, *MBKM* emphasizes an innovative paradigm shift without being constrained by limiting factors (Sopiansyah et al., 2022). This policy is reflected in the 8 *MBKM* programs that can be implemented within or without the study program, including (1) Student Exchange; (2) Internship; (3) Teaching Assistance in Educational Units; (4) Research; (5) Humanitarian Projects; (6) Entrepreneurial Activities; (7) Independent Study; and (8) Thematic Real Work Lecture (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan RI, 2020).

The current implementation of the *MBKM* curriculum by many universities is not without its challenges. Based on observations and preliminary studies in several State Islamic Religious Universities (*PTKIN*), the researchers identified several problems that hinder the optimal functioning of the *MBKM* program. Firstly, the universities are unevenly prepared in terms of lecturers' qualifications and students' skills. Second, the curriculum is not fully synchronized and aligned with the needs of the workforce. Thirdly, different interpretations and understandings of the *MBKM* program by each university often lead to technical challenges such as course conversion and credit transfer. Fourth, differences in assessment standards between universities. Fifth, for economically disadvantaged students, there are costs associated with work placements, including unclear funding arrangements for transport and support costs.

Amidst the enthusiasm for implementing the *MBKM* program, the academic field of Islamic communication is an integral and crucial part. Areas such as Islamic preaching media, Islamic journalism, religious advertising, religious films, Islamic homiletics, and communication for preaching are being actively researched and offer good prospects in both open and competitive job markets (Muis, 2001). Therefore, the

implementation of the 8 *MBKM* programs earmarked for the field of Islamic communication needs more in-depth analysis

The Communication and Islamic Broadcasting program has developed rapidly over the past decade. This progress can be seen in three ways. Firstly, the number of Communication and Islamic Broadcasting Study Programs, based on data from the Association of Islamic Communication and Broadcasting Study Programs (ASKOPIS) in 2022, reached 212, distributed across Indonesia in both public and private universities (ASKOPIS, 2022). Second, these programs, especially in the Dakwah Faculties of *PTKIN*, consistently rank first in terms of the number of applicants, with an average competitiveness ratio of 1:30. Third, the scholarly field of Islamic communication continues to grow in line with the dialectics of knowledge among academics/intellectuals, as evidenced by the increasing number of books and scholarly journals discussing Islamic communication as a perspective (Wahyuni, 2016).

Ahmad Mudrikah et al. previously studied the implementation of the *MBKM* program in *PTKI* (Islamic higher education institutions). With 3,223 respondents consisting of students, lecturers, and educational staff, the study revealed readiness levels of 66% for students, 53% for lecturers, and 83% for educational staff. Additionally, insufficient socialisation of the program at the study program level resulted in several challenges (Mudrikah et al., 2022). Meanwhile, Trysha Yulindaputri and Sutrisno analysed the implementation of *MBKM* by *PTKIN* (State Islamic Higher Education Institutions) using a literature review and descriptive data analysis approach. Their findings indicated that some *PTKIN* institutions were still hesitant and unprepared to implement *MBKM* principles due to the lengthy process of changing mindsets. Other issues included collaboration mechanisms between *PTKINs*, study programs, and external parties (Yuliandariputri, 2023).

In another study, Hawwin Muzakki employed the ADDIE (Analyse, Design, Develop, Implement, Evaluate) model to analyse *MBKM* development at UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah. The analysis involved reviewing the institution's vision and mission and assessing industry needs as part of the curriculum analysis. The design stage involved structuring the academic period for students — four semesters within the program, one semester outside the program, two semesters outside the university and one semester for thesis completion. UIN Sayyid Ali Rahmatullah's development

aspect encompassed eight types of learning activity aimed at enhancing hard and soft skills. Implementation was conducted gradually through six *PTKIN* permata programs. Furthermore, the evaluation aspect involved sharing feedback with relevant stakeholders (Muzakki, 2023a).

Meanwhile, Husen Mony et al. examined the impact of the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* program on learning outcomes in the Bachelor of Communication Science program using a case study approach. Their findings suggest that the *MBKM* program has a positive impact on the learning outcomes of the Bachelor of Communication Science program. Despite lacking a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities due to insufficient information about the policy, faculty members in the Communication Science program also support the initiative (Mony et al., 2021).

Previous studies have explored the challenges of *MBKM* implementation, development, and impact in general universities and Islamic higher education institutions (PTKIs). However, no research has specifically addressed *MBKM* implementation in Islamic communication studies. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the *MBKM* curriculum in the Islamic Communication program at four state Islamic universities (*PTKIN*): UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, UIN Samarinda, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, and UIN Alauddin Makassar. The study will evaluate effective aspects and identify weaknesses to provide policymakers with constructive feedback. It is also expected to serve as a technical guide for the adaptation of *MBKM*, aligning industry needs with graduate learning outcomes (CPL).

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive research design with a qualitative approach. Qualitative descriptive research describes and depicts existing phenomena, whether natural or man-made, focusing on the characteristics, quality, and relationships between activities. In addition, descriptive research does not involve treatment, manipulation, or alteration of the variables being studied, but rather portrays a condition as it is. The only intervention is the research itself, which is conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation (Sukmadinata, 2013). Through

this research, the aim is to analyze the implementation of the *MBKM* curriculum in the field of Islamic Communication at the State Islamic Universities (*PTKIN*).

The study uses both primary and secondary data. Kriyantono defines primary data as information obtained directly from a first-hand source in the field (Kriyantono, 2014). In this study, the primary data sources include statements from university leaders, administrators of the KPI study program, and students from State Islamic Religious Universities (*PTKIN*). The data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation conducted at four *PTKINs*, namely UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, UIN Samarinda, UIN Sunan Kalijaga, and UIN Alauddin Makassar. These four *PTKINs* were selected using purposive sampling, based on considerations of data needs as well as the informants' knowledge and involvement in the research focus (Sayidah, 2018). Institutional criteria included having a KPI study program and actively implementing *MBKM*, as well as representing geographical diversity, from UIN Banten in the west to UIN Makassar in the east, and having access to willing informants. Additional criteria for research informants included *PTKIN* leaders who were directly involved in *MBKM* policymaking, study program administrators who were responsible for *MBKM* curriculum implementation, and active *MBKM* program student participants.

Meanwhile, secondary data, on the other hand, is data obtained indirectly from previous studies, reports, and documents (Prastowo, 2012). Secondary data sources in this study include information from journals, previous research, books, articles, and relevant documents. The data were analyzed using the technique proposed by Miles and Huberman, which involves reducing, presenting, and interpreting the data. In this study, data reduction involved categorizing themes such as *MBKM* implementation, constraints, and infrastructure. The data were then presented in narrative form, and conclusions were drawn by interpreting the data and validating the interview findings through triangulation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the MBKM curriculum in the field of Islamic communication at PTKIN

MBKM aims to enable universities to provide autonomous and flexible learning, offering experiences and learning opportunities tailored to the needs of students. It also aims to fulfill the right of students to learn based on contextual, scientific, and thematic approaches and to facilitate students to learn according to their interests and potential. It provides students with insights and experiences for direct learning in the field corresponding to their interests and fields of study, thus preparing graduates according to the needs of the 5.0 era. This indicates that *MBKM* prepares students as graduates in accordance with the program of study. In addition, students are also prepared to be part of a society capable of addressing the issues and challenges of the 21st century (Rhendika et al., 2022).

Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (Independent Student Exchange) program

Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka (Independent Student Exchange) is a government program that provides students with the opportunity to experience new environments, both on different campuses and in different regions, while pursuing a different course of study from their original university. This allows them to explore different aspects such as culture, language, food, tourism, and more. The knowledge gained can then be applied in their home region and potentially make an impact (Sinaga et al., 2023)

Independent Student Exchange in the *MBKM* curriculum for the field of Islamic communication at *PTKIN* is implemented at two levels. Firstly, independent international student exchange is carried out through the Student Exchange Program and Student Mobility Scheme. This program helps students broaden their international perspectives and gain a deeper understanding of communication studies from a global perspective. During the exchange, students learn not only from academic materials but also from everyday life experiences. They are trained to develop leadership skills, increase their self-confidence, and sharpen their social awareness. UIN Sunan Kalijaga is one of the State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (*PTKIN*) implementing this program in the Communication and

Broadcasting Islamic Studies (KPI) course. During the 2022-2023 period, they successfully converted 27 credit hours (SKS) to represent the Global UGRAD scholarship program in the US.

The program aims to support students, as all costs are covered by the scholarship provider. Sinung Restendy, Secretary of the KPI Study Program, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, stated: *"Alhamdulillah, over the past two years, students have consistently passed the selection process. Our goal is to continue increasing the number of participants."* A similar program was conducted by the KPI Study Program at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin (SMH) in Banten in 2022, sending one student to Brunei Darussalam for four days as part of a Student Mobility program. This initiative continued in 2023 with a mobility program to Thailand. However, the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* scheme could not be applied to this program due to time constraints, as it lasted only a few days and did not span a full semester.

Second, intra-university student exchanges. The implementation of this student exchange varies from being in its early stages to having more than two years of experience. This program allows students to attend classes in other faculties or departments within the same university. It also facilitates interdisciplinary collaboration and enriches students' perspectives in the field of Islamic communication by combining knowledge from different disciplines.

At UIN Samarinda, internal interdisciplinary student exchange is conducted under a scheme whereby all study programs, including the KPI (Communication and Islamic Broadcasting) program, may propose a maximum of three courses for students from other programs to take. As part of the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* curriculum, KPI students can enroll in courses offered by other programs. The Head of the KPI Study Program at Sultan Aji Muhammad Idris Samarinda explained:

"We are just starting as well. Therefore, the internal scheme is the most rational choice, given the management's level of preparedness. For now, the conclusion is that mutual understanding and socialisation between students and lecturers is needed to ensure alignment in its implementation."

The *Merdeka* Student Exchange Program facilitates students to acquire knowledge from different academic fields that they may not have studied before. This enables *Merdeka* students to think flexibly and comprehensively and provides a means to understand different ethnicities, nations, cultures, races, and religions, thus strengthening the essence of national unity (Insani, 2021).

Furthermore, learning in the *Merdeka* Student Exchange Program based on courses presents challenges and opportunities for the development of personality, creativity, innovation, capacity, and the needs of students. This directs lecturers to develop their mindsets and facilitate students with diverse characters according to their needs. Thus, the course-based *Merdeka* Student Exchange between universities is one of the activities that is rich in academic values and character and serves as a crucial component in *MBKM* (Tohir, 2020).

Internship

The internship program of the Communication and Islamic Broadcasting Study Program (KPI) at the State Islamic Religious Universities (*PTKIN*) includes, firstly, a career center program with a rigorous selection process. All information, including the necessary steps, is obtained from the Career Centre. The duration of the internship is adapted to the needs of each institution. As an official path managed by the university or institution, the selection process in this scheme tends to be more rigorous (Wardhani et al., 2022). This ensures that the selected candidates actually have the qualifications and skills required by the company or organization where they will be interning.

Career centers within universities act as a bridge between students and industry. In the context of the KPI program, this system is one way of providing students with direct experience of the world of work relevant to their field of study (Zamroni, 2015). Through the Career Centre, students have the opportunity to apply for and be selected for internships in various companies and organizations that collaborate with the university.

The reason for the strict selection process in this internship program is to ensure that the company or organization hosting the internship receives the best candidates. This rigorous selection process includes a series of tests, interviews, and assessments

designed to identify the student's qualifications, skills, and competencies. For the students, this selection process also provides a first insight into how real job selection takes place, helping them to prepare better.

Every company or organization has different needs when it comes to the length of an internship. Some may require short-term internships of a few weeks, while others may require long-term internships of several months. By working with career centers, companies or organizations can communicate their needs and match them with students' academic schedules. This ensures that both companies and students get the most out of the internship program.

Secondly, the *MBKM* Internship Scheme gives students the freedom and authority to initiate internship opportunities themselves. As an alternative to the Careers Centre scheme, students are encouraged to be more proactive in finding and selecting internship placements that match their wishes and aspirations. Through initiatives such as these, students have the opportunity to develop networking skills, independence, and initiative. Whether through peer information or social media, they have ample space to explore different opportunities (Siregar & Wahyuni, 2022).

After identifying the desired placement, the next step for students is to explore directly with the institution. This involves communication processes, whether through visits, phone calls, or e-mails, to understand whether the institution is willing to accept interns and the conditions involved. In many cases, a positive response indicates the institution's openness to accepting students as interns and gives students the certainty to proceed with the next steps.

Upon receiving a positive response from the institution, students will then proceed with the administrative process carried out by the program. This is crucial to ensure that the placement is officially approved and recognized by the university. The administrative process typically involves filling out forms, obtaining approval from the supervising lecturer, and coordinating with the study program regarding dates, duration, and any other necessary requirements. Through this process, students ensure that their internship experience has the full support of the campus. Several internship schemes have been implemented at four selected *PTKINs* (State Islamic Religious Universities). These are listed below (see Table 1).

Table 1. Internship program

No	PTKIN	Internship Scheme
1	UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta	The <i>MBKM</i> internship program with a credit conversion of 20 credits. A total of 24 students opted for the <i>MBKM</i> curriculum, interning at the online media platform Brilio.net for one semester. Eligible courses for conversion included Entrepreneurship, Cyber Journalism, Contemporary Journalism, Data Journalism, Broadcast Journalism, Broadcast Scriptwriting, News Production, Non-News Program Production, Investigative Reporting, Cinematography, Art Direction and Lighting, Sound Design, and Directing Techniques
2	UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Career Centre Scheme: Involves a rigorous selection process. All information is obtained from the Career Centre, including the necessary steps. The internship duration is adjusted according to the needs of each institution. - Student-initiated scheme: Students conduct this independently, either through peer networks or social media. Students can choose their preferred placement and, if they receive a positive response, proceed with administrative processing in their program of study. <p>Unfortunately, this scheme has not yet been incorporated into the <i>MBKM</i> curriculum, so credit conversion is not applicable.</p>
3	UIN Samarinda	Through the <i>MBKM</i> internship scheme. The study program is currently exploring collaborations with several institutions, including Radio Republik Indonesia (RRI) Samarinda, the Samarinda Communication and Informatics Office, and the Samarinda Post print media. If successful, all semester 6 courses may be eligible for conversion.
4	UIN Alauddin Makassar	The internship scheme is conducted in semesters 5 and 6. All skill-based courses in these semesters can be converted through the <i>MBKM</i> internship scheme.

Source: Processed by the researcher

As can be seen from the table, the four *PTKINs* (State Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions) have implemented different internship schemes, including both convertible *MBKM* (*Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka*) internships and campus-based programs that are not yet convertible. One example is the program at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin (SMH) Banten.

The Head of the Communication Science Study Program at UIN SMH Banten explained:

“Some students have interned at Krakatau Steel, a state-owned enterprise (BUMN), but the program has not yet been approved for credit conversion. Once the system is fully operational, I believe it will greatly assist students in learning through corporate internship schemes.”

Additionally, field data indicate varying levels of internship participation. For example, participation at UIN Alauddin Makassar reached 70% (57 out of 80 students) in 2021, but declined to 50% (35 out of 70 students) in 2022. Meanwhile, some institutions, such as UIN Banten, employ student-initiated internship models, while others, such as UIN Sunan Kalijaga, implement centralized internship schemes where host institutions are predetermined.

Through the internship activities, students will also realize that their on-campus lectures have helped to prepare them for the future. The internship program benefits not only the participating students but also the partners who provide opportunities for the students (Fatah, 2021). The success of a policy program depends on the alignment of three implementation elements: the compatibility between the policy program and the beneficiaries, the compatibility between the program and the implementing organization, and the alignment between the beneficiary group and the implementing organization (Christianingrum & Djumiarti, 2019).

Research

The existing research program is a collaboration between students and lecturers. Students act as assistants and help with secondary tasks within the research. Despite the existence of collaborative research involving students, this activity has not been implemented within the *MBKM* curriculum scheme, making it unconvertible.

The research scheme in the *MBKM* curriculum is a crucial component that enables students to delve deeper into their preferred areas of research. The research scheme is designed to encourage students to undertake research or creative projects outside the core curriculum of their program (Kayati & Kusuma, 2023). It provides an

opportunity for students to develop critical, analytical, and innovative thinking skills through the research process.

The scheme also offers students the opportunity to collaborate with lecturers, researchers, and even industry professionals, giving them real-world experience in conducting research and expanding their professional networks. The presence of a research program in the *MBKM* curriculum emphasizes that higher education focuses not only on the transfer of knowledge but also on developing students' abilities to create new knowledge through research. This prepares graduates who can compete in the global era and meet the demands of industry and society in the future.

Research schemes in the *MBKM* curriculum have not yet been widely implemented. However, the Communication and Islamic Broadcasting Program (Prodi KPI) at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten is among the pioneers. This research scheme involves collaboration between students and lecturers. Funding for this collaborative research comes from the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication budget. Students act as assistants, handling secondary tasks in the research.

While there are already collaborative research projects involving students, this initiative has not yet been integrated into the *MBKM* curriculum, meaning it cannot be converted into academic credits. Muhibuddin, Head of the KPI Program at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten, said:

"To equip students with a diverse range of graduate-level skills, research competence is essential. Students will gain substantial field research experience. However, it must be acknowledged that converting these activities into relevant course credits requires time and policy decisions from the leadership."

Challenges in the implementation of the MBKM curriculum in Islamic communication science

Concept to implementation problems

The challenges faced by the Study Program of Islamic Communication Sciences (Prodi KPI) at PTKIN in the category of implementation of the *MBKM* curriculum, from the conceptual to the practical level, include, firstly, different views on the concept of the *MBKM* curriculum in practical terms (Bakti & Meidasari, 2014). This is

partly due to the fact that the concept of *MBKM* is not fully understood, resulting in different perspectives or interpretations on how it should be implemented (Abas, 2017; Putra et al., 2022). One of the main reasons for these different interpretations is the lack of a clear definition of what *MBKM* entails. Although there are general guidelines, without detailed explanations, this can lead to confusion.

Teachers need to be properly socialized and trained in the implementation of the *MBKM* curriculum. Without proper understanding and guidance on how to implement this concept, different interpretations can arise. Lack of clear communication between the government, teachers, and students on the objectives of the *MBKM* curriculum can lead to misunderstandings (Nona et al., 2022).

With different views and understandings, teaching methods may vary between different classes or different teachers (HR & Wakia, 2022). If internal stakeholders have different views about what is expected of students in the context of *MBKM*, this may influence how lecturers assess or evaluate student performance.

There is still limited understanding and awareness of *MBKM* among students, teachers, and university management. This may hinder the success of the *MBKM* program as stakeholders do not have a solid understanding of the concept and objectives of this program (Uswatiyah et al., 2021).

Secondly, students may fail to achieve the Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL) when undertaking industry internships due to a misalignment between educational expectations or standards and the realities of the field. In some cases, courses taught at university do not fully align with industry needs or expectations. Consequently, even if students have met certain academic standards, they may not be fully prepared for the challenges of the professional world.

This issue has arisen in relation to CPL alignment in the Contemporary Journalism course at UIN Sunan Kalijaga. The program cannot ensure that the intended CPL is practised during internships. Another example can be seen in Expected Learning Outcome (ELO) 9, which states that students should produce creative works that contain Islamic-nationalist values while remaining relevant to contemporary developments. In practice, however, the creative works produced remain generic and lack Islamic teachings. Such discrepancies require an agreement between the course and the internship institutions.

If the curriculum emphasizes theory over practice, students may feel less prepared when faced with real-life industry situations. Not all placements provide quality experiences. If students are placed in an industry that does not provide adequate guidance or relevant tasks, they may not achieve the expected CPL.

A similar issue arose at UIN SMH Banten due to ambiguous policies. There is a conceptual debate among stakeholders regarding the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM)* scheme. Some argue that courses included in the MBKM scheme should only be open to students from different programs of study. Conversely, another perspective suggests that different courses can be selected within the MBKM scheme, provided they remain relevant and thematically related.

Another factor is the lack of communication between educational institutions and industry about the expectations of the placement experience (Anggraini & Haryono, 2022). Without close collaboration and clear communication, students may find themselves in situations where they cannot meet the GLO. The absence of mentors or supervisors during placements who can guide students through the practical learning process could be one of the reasons for unfulfilled GLO.

Curriculum development requires a curriculum development policy that considers alignment with the vision and mission of the university, the advancement of knowledge, and the needs of stakeholders (Rahman, 2017). In addition, universities need to develop curriculum development guidelines and implementation guidelines that include monitoring and reviewing the curriculum, considering stakeholder feedback, and the achievement of strategic challenges to ensure its relevance and currency (Muzakki, 2023).

The lack of effective evaluation processes during and after placements may mean that students do not receive the feedback they need to improve their skills. The curriculum used by educational institutions might be outdated or not aligned with current industry needs, resulting in a mismatch between education and industry practices (Nofia, 2020).

Addressing these issues requires close cooperation between educational institutions and industry. Educational institutions need to ensure that their curricula are relevant to current workforce needs, while industries need to provide constructive

feedback to educational institutions and students to improve the quality of placements and ensure that GLOs can be met (Marisa, 2021).

Redistributing courses across semesters and developing tools to recognize student learning are essential. Restructuring to create flexibility to support learning processes beyond the study program is a mandatory requirement for the implementation of the Independent Campus Learning policy (Tohir, 2020)

Programs can create new courses to meet the expected graduate profiles. This can also be done by providing learning experiences through digital interaction methods and/or learning strategies using information and communication technologies. Blended learning is one way to promote 21st-century work skills (Kodrat, 2021; Suryaman, 2020)

Third, a mismatch between the academic year and industry practices. Most universities have a rigid academic year structure with specific times for academic activities, exams, holidays, and so on. Meanwhile, industry needs often do not follow this academic rhythm. Industries may have the highest demand for placements during periods that coincide with crucial times in the academic calendar, such as mid-semester or end-of-semester exams.

Some industries require longer placements than the time usually allocated by universities in the *MBKM* framework. This may force students to choose between continuing the internship or returning to their academic activities. At certain times of the year, such as during semester breaks, many students seek internship opportunities, which increases competition and reduces the chances for students to find internships that match their interests and needs.

The challenges facing universities in curriculum development in the industry 4.0 era include producing graduates with new literacy skills, namely data literacy, technology literacy, and human literacy, leading to the cultivation of virtuous character. One effort to address these challenges is the emergence of a policy of the right to learn for students beyond their study programs (Mariati, 2021; RI, 2020).

Readiness of infrastructure, budget, and human resources

Firstly, inadequate infrastructure at the placement sites is a challenge. Adequate facilities are essential to support the smooth running of the placement

program. Adequate facilities ensure that students have an optimal learning experience and facilitate knowledge transfer and skills development.

Inadequate facilities can impede students' learning and practical experience, thus affecting the quality of knowledge and skills gained during the placement. A balance should be struck between the central government, universities, and the placement industry to ensure adequate infrastructure. The quality of facilities reflects the commitment of stakeholders to quality education and human resource development.

The Communication and Islamic Broadcasting Program (KPI) at UIN Samarinda experiences these physical limitations. When offering courses to students from other programs, academic administrators must calculate classroom capacity. For example, if a classroom can accommodate a maximum of 30 students, these places must be allocated between KPI students and students from other programs who wish to enroll in KPI courses. This means that, if the class exceeds capacity, students affected who wish to take the same course must yield their place. In this context, all stakeholders must engage in continuous evaluation and improvement. The *MBKM* program has great potential to develop students' skills, and conducive conditions will undoubtedly improve the quality of the program's output.

Secondly, the lack of a specific budget for the operation of the *MBKM* curriculum is a concern. Without adequate funding, the implementation of the curriculum may not reach its full potential. Facilities, teacher training, learning materials, and other resources that support the teaching-learning process require funding. Inadequate funding can affect the quality of education provided to students, potentially leading to a lack of competencies upon graduation.

Students on the KPI Study Program at Sunan Kalijaga UIN Yogyakarta face these challenges. The operational tools used during the *MBKM* internship often rely on students' personal laptops, since computers and laptops at the internship locations are usually reserved for employees. Meanwhile, operating the latest editing software requires laptops with specific specifications, hindering students' progress.

The KPI Study Program at UIN Samarinda also experiences budget constraints, which limit the implementation of the *MBKM* curriculum to internal circles only. Executing the *MBKM* curriculum technically and conceptually requires funding, for

instance, for field supervisor lecturers (DPL), students' technical needs, and other expenses, all of which must comply with budget allocation regulations.

The absence of a specific budget reflects a lack of commitment by the government or educational institutions to the *MBKM* program. Financial commitment demonstrates seriousness in supporting the success of a program. Universities need to explore alternative sources of funding for the operation of *MBKM* curricula, such as collaboration with the private sector or special scholarship programs. Universities must review and evaluate funding policies related to the *MBKM* curriculum. The importance of budgeting to support this program needs to be understood and prioritized. A specific budget for the operation of the *MBKM* curriculum is essential to ensure the sustainability and quality of the program.

When learning freedom is fulfilled, it creates "independent learning," and the school is called an independent or liberating school (Bashori et al., 2020). This sense of well-being needs to be created by all components involved in the provision of education in schools, homes, and communities.

Thirdly, students' skills are still somewhat limited when it comes to the needs of industry. *MBKM* courses in universities may not be in line with the latest developments in industry. As a result, students lack relevant skills or knowledge during their internships. The Communication and Islamic Broadcasting (KPI) study program at UIN Sultan Maulana Hasanuddin Banten has found that the abilities of each student can vary significantly. This presents a challenge when arranging internships in companies or professional institutions/agencies. While some students have already mastered the use of equipment, many others still struggle. However, the tools used by the host companies are very expensive.

Industries move fast, especially in the technological field. If the curriculum is not regularly updated, this gap can widen. While students may understand certain theories, they may not know how to apply them in real-life situations. Internships offer students the opportunity to apply what they've learned, but without a strong foundation, they may feel overwhelmed. The facilities in universities may not be the same as those in industry (Hasim, 2020). This can affect students' preparation before internships. For example, if universities do not have the latest hardware or software

used in the industry, students may feel unprepared when faced with such technology during internships.

The implementation of the *MBKM* program requires quality and adequate human resources to build an effective program. However, the lack of human resources can be an obstacle to its implementation (Rahman, 2017). With the emergence of new communities such as the knowledge society, information society, and networked society, the mastery of information and networking has become a critical asset. The increasing demand for creativity and innovation is becoming essential for individuals to cope with the ongoing competition (Jelantik, 2019).

Fourth, students' understanding of *MBKM* programs and curricula is not comprehensive. *MBKM* programs and curricula may have many complicated details and components. If this information is not delivered in an easily understandable manner, students may struggle to grasp the overall concept. Ineffective methods of information delivery, such as short explanations, may result in students losing interest or finding it difficult to access the information. The lack of orientation sessions, workshops, or seminars specifically dedicated to *MBKM* could be a factor that causes students to misunderstand these programs and curricula (Suwandi, 2020).

Without clear incentives or motivation for students to understand *MBKM*, whether in terms of academic benefits, career opportunities, or other benefits, they may lack the enthusiasm to seek further information. Similarly, changes or updates to *MBKM* programs and curricula without adequate socialization can lead to confusion among students. Universities may assume that students already understand certain concepts or can find information on their own when, in fact, they may need further guidance (Sanjaya, 2009). Discussions between students often help to deepen understanding of concepts. If there is a lack of interaction or discussion forums on *MBKM*, students may miss the opportunity to discuss and better understand the curriculum. To address this issue, educational institutions need to promote socialization, provide supporting resources, and ensure that all information related to *MBKM* is communicated to students in a clear, accurate, and engaging manner (Susetyo, 2020).

Fifth, limited class capacity and quotas. Limited class capacity for the *MBKM* program raises several issues that can affect both students and the universities

themselves. With limited capacity, not all interested students can participate in the *MBKM* program. This can lead to disappointment among students and a potential loss of opportunity for those who genuinely need or are interested in the program. In some cases, smaller class sizes are considered to improve the quality of interaction between teachers and students (Nasution, 1999). However, if the capacity is too small and does not reflect the needs of the student population, many students may miss out on a rich learning experience.

Limited teaching capacity indicates that resources (such as classrooms, facilities, or teachers) are insufficient to meet demand. This may be an indicator that institutions need to increase investment in resources or infrastructure. If capacity is limited, universities need to implement strict selection criteria to select participants in the *MBKM* program. This selection process must be transparent and fair to avoid negative perceptions among students. If many students cannot access the *MBKM* program due to limited capacity, this will affect the reputation of the university in the eyes of the public. In addition, in the long run, there may be many graduates who lack the additional competencies that the *MBKM* program should have provided.

Faced with the challenge of limited class capacity for *MBKM*, educational institutions need short and long-term strategies to ensure that as many students as possible can effectively benefit from this program. Therefore, the willingness of various parties, intensive socialization, and government support are needed to minimize the problems and challenges in implementing this policy and to achieve the expected goals (Hasanah, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The *MBKM* curriculum has been implemented in Islamic Communication Studies at *PTKIN* (State Islamic Higher Education Institutions) and is now in its initial operational stage. It is generally running well, with a focus on several key areas of communication studies, including journalism, preaching (*dakwah*), and public relations. Of the nine *MBKM* schemes available, only three are predominantly utilised: First, the Independent Student Exchange (*Pertukaran Mahasiswa Merdeka/PMM*), operating at two levels: international student exchange through the Student Exchange Program and Student Mobility schemes, and domestic exchanges within the

university network. Second, the internship scheme is facilitated through two channels: the university's career centre, which has a rigorous selection process, and student-initiated opportunities obtained independently, either through peer networks or social media. Third, the research scheme, which has so far been implemented through collaborations between students and lecturers.

These three schemes cover 33% of the national MBKM options, indicating partial adoption by PTKINs based on the specific conditions of each institution. However, of these dominant schemes, the research scheme requires the most development due to a lack of cross-campus and industry collaboration, as well as an absence of a credit conversion (SKS) mechanism. Several challenges have emerged in translating the MBKM curriculum from concept to practice, including divergent interpretations of the MBKM curriculum at the implementation level, unfulfilled learning outcomes (CPL) when students undertake industry internships, and misalignment between the academic calendar and industry internship schedules. Additionally, obstacles related to infrastructure, the budget, and human resources include limited classroom capacity and quotas, inadequate internship facilities, a lack of dedicated operational funding for the MBKM curriculum, and students' limited ability to meet industry demands and incomplete understanding of MBKM schemes and the curriculum. In order to support the transition from initial implementation to full maturity, it is essential to harmonize MBKM standards across stakeholders, allocate resources based on field needs, and foster collaboration between the PTKIN ecosystem and industry.

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