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BEST PRACTICES IN MBKM CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION AT STATE UNIVERSITIES IN INDONESIA

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Kata Kunci:	ABSTRAK
implementasi kurikulum MBKM; pendidikan tinggi di indonesia; program manajemen pendidikan; inovasi kurikulum di pendidikan tinggi	Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) merupakan strategi penting reformasi pendidikan tinggi di Indonesia. Penelitian ini mengkaji implementasi kurikulum MBKM pada Program Studi Manajemen Pendidikan di Universitas Negeri Jakarta dan Universitas Negeri Malang melalui pendekatan kualitatif. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa magang, proyek sosial, dan asistensi mengajar meningkatkan kompetensi mahasiswa dan relevansi pembelajaran dengan dunia kerja. Namun, koordinasi yang lemah, keterbatasan digital dosen, dan perbedaan budaya akademik masih menjadi kendala. Solusi yang ditawarkan adalah penguatan peran dosen, perluasan kerja sama eksternal, dan pengembangan kurikulum adaptif. Temuan ini menegaskan peran MBKM dalam memperkuat reformasi pendidikan tinggi dan menyiapkan lulusan yang lebih kompetitif.
Keywords:	ABSTRACTS
MBKM curriculum implementation; higher education in indonesia; education management programs; curriculum innovation in higher education	The Freedom of Learning-Independent Campus (MBKM) policy serves as a key strategy for higher education reform in Indonesia. This study explores the implementation of the MBKM curriculum in the Educational Management Study Program at Universitas Negeri Jakarta and Universitas Negeri Malang using a qualitative approach. The findings indicate that internship programs, social projects, and teaching assistance enhance students' competencies and the relevance of learning to labor market demands. However, challenges remain in terms of coordination, lecturers' digital readiness, differences in academic culture. Therefore, strengthening the role of lecturers, expanding external partnerships, developing an adaptive curriculum are required to ensure the sustainability of MBKM implementation and improve the quality of higher education in Indonesia.

A. INTRODUCTION

Higher education, as the main pillar in producing superior human resources, is now faced with a significant challenge: constantly improving the quality of education (Abdillah 2024). The dynamics of the ever-evolving times demand higher education institutions to be adaptive and responsive to change (Marzuqi and Ahid 2023). To answer this challenge, the government launched the Freedom of Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) policy to create an innovative learning model relevant to students' needs (Meke, Astro, and Daud 2022). The Freedom of Learning Independent Campus carries a flexible intracurricular learning approach with various content that allows students to delve deeper into concepts and strengthen competencies optimally (Muthmainah 2022). Implementing this curriculum in state universities is directed to prepare students to face social transformation, cultural change, the dynamics of the world of work, and the acceleration of technology (Shaffan Waliudin, Aziz, and Zaenul Fitri 2023). Therefore, universities must design a creative and meaningful learning process so that students can develop attitudes, knowledge, and skills comprehensively (Faiz and Purwati 2021). The main goal of implementing the Independent Curriculum is to form competent and adaptive graduates (Arifin et al. 2023). The advantage of this curriculum lies in the freedom given to students to choose and direct their learning process according to their future interests and goals.

Referring to the regulations issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Freedom of Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) program began to be implemented in various universities with four main policies, namely: (1) the opening of new study programs, (2) the university accreditation system, (3) the change of the status of universities to legal entities, and (4) the granting of the right to students to study outside the study program for three semesters (Pulungan 2022). These policies are designed to support the readiness of graduates to face the challenges of the ever-evolving world of work. Through the MBKM program, students are allowed to expand their academic and practical experience, with one semester allowed to take courses across study programs and two semesters to participate in off-campus learning activities (Baharuddin 2021). These various activities include internships, research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurship projects, community service, student exchanges, and independent projects, all carried out under supervisors' guidance.

Following Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020, MBKM aims to provide a contextual learning experience that can hone students' competence, creativity, and work readiness. This program is also intended to reconstruct the paradigm of higher education to be more flexible and adaptive to students individual interests and needs (Majid 2024). Although some forms of MBKM programs had been implemented in several universities before this policy was enacted, their previous implementation was still limited, unstructured, and not fully optimal (Susilawati 2021). The MBKM program provides a variety of opportunities for students, including (1) the opportunity to take courses outside the study program, both inside and outside the university, (2) internships or work practices in the industrial world or other workplaces, (3) carry out community service projects guided by lecturers, and (4) participate in student exchanges or research abroad (Wati Desi Sri Setyo, Aziz Abd, and Fitri Agus Zaenul 2023). Thus, the primary goal of MBKM is to encourage students to become lifelong learners, master various cross-disciplinary sciences, and have high adaptability, critical thinking, and 21st

century skills. It is hoped that university graduates in Indonesia can be more prepared and relevant to the demands of the times.

Basically, the various programs covered by the MBKM policy have existed and were run at universities before this policy was enforced. However, implementing some of these programs still seem secondary and have not been thoroughly planned and implemented optimally (Susilawati 2021). In this problem, training, mentoring, integrated system development, conversion standardization, evaluation, continuous adjustment, and collaboration between institutions are needed to support the implementation of MBKM according to its objectives (Rahmadia, Rahma, and Shoubil Haq 2022). For the maximum implementation of MBKM, the first step must start at the study program level. Study programs need to develop the curriculum by adjusting the MBKM policy in order to create flexible learning, according to student needs, and avoid monotonous learning (Maghfiroh and Sholeh 2022). Study programs must also collaborate with other universities, industry, government, and the community to support the implementation of MBKM through programs that are in line with the Independent Learning curriculum policy (Nur 2023). This Freedom of Learning Independent Campus policy can strengthen the efforts of study programs in preparing graduates who have soft skills (soft skills), Technical skills (hard skills), as well as experience outside of the study program, so that they are ready to compete in the world of work (Kuncoro, Handayani, and Suprihatin 2022).

Study programs are also required to innovate in efforts to develop their programs. According to Sopiansyah & Masruroh's research, the Freedom of Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) policy must be followed by innovation in curriculum development following the Freedom of Learning Independent Campus policy (Sopiansyah and Masruroh 2021). In the learning process, the curriculum is an essential element in the education system. The MBKM curriculum is designed to meet the needs of educational institutions through cooperation between universities and related partners (Wianto et al. 2023). The implementation is adjusted to each university's conditions, aiming to produce graduates who have broad insights and are ready to become agents of change. This is driven by technological advances that force universities to transform to produce graduates who are competitive, productive, superior, and able to compete in the global market.

To realize this, the government has set a strategic plan that must be carried out by universities in the Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 13 of 2022-2024, which includes three main development goals, namely: (1) improving the quality of learning and the relevance of higher education, (2) improving the quality of lecturers and education staff, and (3) creating quality governance of the Directorate General of Higher Education. Indicators of MBKM success are graduates who are relevant to the needs of the world of work or have the ability to be entrepreneurial (Rahmah and Sukiman 2024). Students are provided with hands-on work experience with guidance from lecturers and practitioners, as well as the opportunity to study outside of the study program to enhance their network and experience.

In the MBKM program, students can earn up to 60 credits through learning experiences outside their study program and campus, such as internships, community service, teaching assistance, and social projects, allowing them to develop practical skills and competencies relevant to future careers. Indonesian universities, both

independently and in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, have implemented various MBKM activities for undergraduate and applied students. Program success is assessed through the Main Performance Indicators of State Universities (IKU-PTN) and students' off-campus experiences. Despite growth since 2020, the number of students recognized for 20 credits from off-campus learning remains below targets, highlighting challenges such as coordination issues, lecturers' digital competency gaps, and limited external partnerships. To address these, universities are encouraged to strengthen lecturers' roles, enhance collaboration with industry and community partners, design adaptive curricula, and implement ongoing monitoring and evaluation to optimize MBKM outcomes.

Some of the problems found in the implementation of MBKM in universities include the problem of grade conversion, the unpreparedness of universities in adjusting the MBKM curriculum, and doubts about the sustainability of the implementation of this curriculum (Zahra, Pujiati, and Hestiningtyas 2024). Therefore, these problems need to be overcome by involving all education policy stakeholders, and the government needs to develop, empower, and facilitate all related parties, such as lecturers, students, the business world, and industry. This research was conducted at two universities under the Ministry of Education and Culture that have implemented the MBKM program, namely the State University of Jakarta and the State University of Malang. This study aims to answer three main questions: (1) How is the MBKM curriculum implemented in the Education Management study programs at UNJ and UM? (2) What challenges have these universities encountered during the implementation? (3) What strategies can be adopted to overcome these challenges? To achieve this, the research employed a qualitative descriptive case study design using observation, interviews, and document analysis, because this methodology provides an in-depth exploration of practices, challenges, and solutions that are directly aligned with the objectives of the study.

This research contributes to the development of a higher education curriculum that is adaptive to social, cultural, and technological changes. Through the Freedom of Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) policy, universities are encouraged to not only pursue academic achievements but also to shape graduates with comprehensive competencies that are relevant to future demands. The curriculum's flexibility allows students to engage in contextual and experiential learning beyond their core study program (Sutriningsih et al. 2023). Using a qualitative descriptive case study design, the research explores practices, constraints, and solutions in both universities, which were selected based on PEMUTU PT/PS data showing MBKM implementation above 20 percent. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and document analysis, with validity ensured through systematic data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing.

B. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach to describe and explain the problems discussed in depth (Sugiono 2018). A case study design was applied to allow for a contextual and comprehensive exploration of MBKM curriculum implementation in two universities. The method applied is descriptive, which makes it possible to describe and explain in detail the implementation and readiness of public and private

universities under the Ministry of Religion related to evaluating the Independent Learning curriculum policy in Islamic religious universities. The data sources in this study are limited to two universities, namely the State University of Jakarta and the State University of Malang. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, involving lecturers directly engaged in MBKM activities, with consideration of their programs of study and level of involvement to ensure representativeness. The data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and document studies. The documents analyzed included curriculum guidelines, MBKM policy documents, and institutional implementation reports, and their relevance to the research questions was carefully considered.

Data analysis was conducted by manually labeling and grouping the information from interviews, observations, and documents to identify main patterns and themes, following clear steps to ensure consistency and transparency. The validity of the data was tested using three strategies: 1) data reduction, 2) data presentation, and 3) conclusions drawn. Validity and reliability were further strengthened through triangulation between documents, observations, and interviews, member checking with selected lecturers to verify findings, and peer review by colleagues familiar with MBKM implementation. These strategies ensured that the results were trustworthy and accurately represented the phenomena studied. Using this technique also helps researchers preserveis technique also helps researchers in maintaining technique also allows researchers maintain data validity throughout the research process. (Susanto, Risnita, and Jailani 2023). The study was conducted in alignment with the MBKM implementation and key academic cycles to ensure that the data collected is contextually relevant to the program.

This research was conducted at two universities under the Ministry of Education and Culture, namely the State University of Jakarta and the State University of Malang, which have implemented the MBKM curriculum. Based on data from Higher Education Monitoring, Evaluation, and Quality Assurance (PEMUTU PT/PS), the implementation of the MBKM curriculum at the two universities has reached more than 20%, which shows that the implementation of the MBKM curriculum at the State University of Jakarta and the State University of Malang has met the standard of successful implementation. The State University of Jakarta has 5,223 students who take part in MBKM, or 20.64% of the total 25,307 students, so it is declared to meet the requirements for implementing the MBKM curriculum. Meanwhile, the State University of Malang also implements an MBKM curriculum above 21%. Therefore, it can be concluded that the State University of Jakarta and the State University of Malang can be used as models in terms of strategy and success in implementing the MBKM curriculum.

C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

MBKM Curriculum Program

Despite the widespread implementation of the MBKM program in Indonesian universities, a gap remains in understanding how these activities align with students' academic curricula and whether they effectively enhance the competencies required by the workforce. The Freedom of Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) Curriculum is designed to equip students with both adaptive skills necessary for the dynamic world of

work and soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving (Rahmawati, Maharani, and Sutarbari 2024). Through this policy, students have the freedom to select courses according to their interests and needs, which promotes self-development and exploration beyond the core curriculum. This study specifically examines how the implementation of MBKM corresponds with students' practical learning experiences and identifies the challenges they encounter in achieving the intended learning outcomes. Consequently, MBKM emphasizes not only theoretical mastery but also practical field experience, broadening students' perspectives, fostering independence, and preparing them to contribute effectively to the workforce. Participation in MBKM has been shown to enhance both soft skills and hard skills, which are crucial for success after graduation (Saputra 2024). Moreover, according to Ramadhan, Wicaksana, and Yelianti (2024), the MBKM program enhances students' competencies, including soft skills and entrepreneurship, with benefits of approximately 84–85%, underlining the importance of aligning these activities with the academic curriculum.

Forms of MBKM Curriculum Activities

The MBKM program offers nine learning activities: student exchanges, internships/work practices, teaching assistance in educational units, research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurial activities, independent studies/projects, and building villages/thematic community service programs. Students are allowed to choose activities outside the main curriculum of their study program. Based on interviews, the student exchange program at the State University of Jakarta (UNJ) is a flagship MBKM initiative of the university. Through this program, students develop an appreciation for cultural, ideological, religious, and belief diversity, while enhancing their collaborative skills and social sensitivity toward communities and the environment. The activities are organized in collaboration with partner universities, formally recognized by UNJ, and awarded credits in accordance with university regulations. This program is considered a flagship because the number of inbound and outbound student participants exceeds that of other MBKM activities. UNJ's partners include universities in Semarang and other institutions with a strong focus on education. While UNJ highlights student exchanges as a leading MBKM activity, the University of Malang (UM) adopts a slightly different approach in structuring its MBKM programs.

The University of Malang offers an excellent program within the MBKM framework, which is designed to provide an innovative and comprehensive learning experience for students. This program is carried out in a package by converting 8-9 courses into 20 credits. The informant explained that through MBKM, students have the opportunity to take learning outside their study program for one semester (equivalent to 20 credits) at the same university or a maximum of two semesters (equivalent to 40 credits) at different universities, either in the same or different study programs, as well as learning outside of the university. This flexibility reflects international best practices in curriculum reform, where student mobility and interdisciplinary exposure are encouraged to foster holistic competencies (Gouédard et al. 2020). The MBKM activity is then converted into a university-choice course totaling 20 credits. The course is prepared by the university and entered into SIAKAD by the faculty after receiving approval from the relevant study program in the curriculum. The

names and codes of the university's chosen courses, each worth 20 credits, are presented in the following table.

Table 1: MBKM Conversion from University Elective Courses

No	Course Name University Choice	Course Code	Sum Credits
1.	Developing villages and regions	UNIV236022	20
2.	Campus teaching in school	UNIV236023	20
3.	Magang industry	UNIV236024	20
4.	Research internship	UNIV236025	20
5.	Humanitarian projects	UNIV236026	20
6.	Entrepreneurship projects	UNIV236027	20
7.	Independent Study	UNIV236028	20

MBKM activities are converted into conversion packages consisting of elective courses and/or specific compulsory courses relevant to MBKM activities that have been determined since the beginning of curriculum preparation by the study program. These compulsory courses include KKN, KPL/PKL/PLP, and scientific and expert courses following the MBKM BKP taken by students. The study program prepares this conversion package, which is then entered into SIAKAD by the faculty after receiving approval from the relevant study program in the master curriculum.

Implementation of the MBKM Curriculum

At the State University of Jakarta (UNJ), the MBKM Curriculum is implemented by adjusting the curriculum in all study programs, with grant support from the Ministry of Education, Research, and Higher Education. One of the opportunities given to students is to participate in an inter-university exchange program (U to U), which allows students to study outside their home campus. However, in its implementation, exchanges between universities with similar study programs are more frequent. This is done so that the curriculum between universities is not too different and the expected competencies are still achieved. This approach aligns with alignment theory in curriculum design, which emphasizes that external learning experiences should still meet the intended learning outcomes of the home institution (Walsh 2007). Several courses at UNJ are prepared for conversion, although there are both advantages and disadvantages related to this among lecturers. For this reason, conversion courses are required as elective courses, while compulsory courses for study programs are completed in the first four semesters. At UNJ, the implementation of MBKM reaches a maximum of 20 credits.

At the State University of Malang (UM), implementing MBKM also involves restructuring the 2018 curriculum by making several elective courses into conversion courses, which are adjusted to the allocation of 20 credits for programs such as KKN and KPM. UM has five principles in implementing MBKM: academic flexibility, recognition of credit transfers, quality guidance, comprehensive career preparation, and the development of soft skills and hard skills. Such principles are consistent with competency-based education models that have been widely adopted in higher education reforms globally (Mustofa, Dara, and Sok 2025), highlighting the importance

of integrating both hard and soft skills into curriculum structures. To facilitate the implementation of MBKM, UM implements MBKM packages prepared by each study program. Each package is converted into elective courses, so students can easily enroll in the program and design their study completion strategies. The Education Administration study program at UM, for example, offers packages specifically designed to support the implementation of MBKM.

No	Kode MK	Nama MK	SKS	Relevansi SCPL
1.	PMAPUM6051	Manajemen Perpustakaan Sekolah	2	SCPL 3
2.	PMAPUM6056	Supervisi Satuan Pendidikan	2	SCPL 5
3.	PMAPUM6041	Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah	2	SCPL 3
4.	PMAPUM6044	Manajemen Layanan Khusus	2	SCPL 3
5.	PMAPUM6038	Kepemimpinan Pembelajaran	2	SCPL 4
6.	PMAPUM6043	Manajemen Laboratorium Sekolah	2	SCPL 3
7.	UKPLUM6090	KPL Manajemen Pendidikan	4	SCPL 1,2, 3, 4, 5
8.	UKKNUM6090	KKN	4	SCPL 1,2, 3, 4, 5
Total SKS BKP: Magang/Praktik Kerja			20	

No	Kode MK	Nama MK	SKS	Relevansi SCPL
1.	PMAPUM6034	Ekonomi Pendidikan	2	SCPL 3
2.	PMAPUM6036	Industri Kreatif Pendidikan	2	SCPL 3
3.	PMAPUM6037	Inovasi Kewirausahaan Pendidikan	2	SCPL 3
4.	PMAPUM6041	Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah	2	SCPL 3
5.	PMAPUM6044	Manajemen Layanan Khusus	2	SCPL 3
6.	PMAPUM6048	Manajemen Pendidikan Dasar	2	SCPL 3
7.	PMAPUM6038	Kepemimpinan Pembelajaran	2	SCPL 4
8.	PMAPUM6056	Supervisi Satuan Pendidikan	2	SCPL 5
9.	UKKNUM6090	KKN	4	SCPL 1,2, 3, 4, 5
Total SKS BKP: Kewirausahaan			20	

No	Kode MK	Nama MK	SKS	Relevansi SCPL
1.	UKKNUM6090	KKN	4	SCPL 1,2, 3, 4, 5
2.	UKPLUM6090	KPL Manajemen Pendidikan	4	SCPL 1,2, 3, 4, 5
3.	PMAPUM6041	Manajemen Berbasis Sekolah	2	SCPL 3
4.	PMAPUM6042	Manajemen Kelas	2	SCPL 3
5.	PMAPUM6044	Manajemen Layanan Khusus	2	SCPL 3
6.	PMAPUM6048	Manajemen Pendidikan Dasar	2	SCPL 3
7.	PMAPUM6038	Kepemimpinan Pembelajaran	2	SCPL 4
8.	PMAPUM6056	Supervisi Satuan Pendidikan	2	SCPL 5
Total SKS BKP: Studi/Proyek Independen			20	

Figure 1: MBKM Package for Educational Administration Study Program

The Freedom of Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) curriculum aims to prepare students to face an increasingly dynamic world of work that requires adaptive skills, such as communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. Previous research shows that the implementation of the MBKM program in Indonesia has positively impacted the enhancement of graduate competencies, both in soft skills and hard skills, which are relevant to the demands of the workforce (Hartono et al. 2022). Based on the study's results, the MBKM program has been proven to significantly improve students' soft skills. This is in line with the goal of MBKM, which emphasizes the development of more applicative and practical skills, not just mastery of theory (Rodin, Warsah, and Warlizasusi 2024). These increased soft skills can also be derived from the practical activities that MBKM offers, such as internships, student exchanges, and entrepreneurship projects, which provide students with hands-on experience in the field, broaden their perspectives, and increase independence. Furthermore, evidence suggests that MBKM participation has positively impacted employability rates,

enhanced students' communication abilities, and fostered greater independence and adaptability in professional environments. Therefore, this finding confirms the relevance of MBKM in achieving its goals, which are to prepare students to face the challenges of the world of work through experiential learning.

However, not all students feel the same benefits. Some of them report that the MBKM activities they participated in did not provide a significant increase. Some factors identified as the cause include the mismatch between the MBKM activities and the courses taken or the expected learning outcomes. These findings indicate the importance of alignment between the practical activities of MBKM and the academic curriculum that students follow to optimize the results achieved. However, despite these successes, there are still gaps between MBKM activities and academic requirements, indicating the need for stronger curriculum–activity integration. This echoes findings from previous studies on experiential learning programs in other countries, which stress the importance of embedding reflective assessment and structured mentorship into off-campus learning experiences to maximize outcomes (Syahrudin and Tambaip 2023).

The MBKM activity that has received the most attention is the student exchange program implemented at the State University of Jakarta (UNJ). The program allows students to study at partner colleges outside of their campus, enriching their understanding of cultural, religious, and worldview diversity and enhancing their ability to work with a wide range of stakeholders. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that student exchange programs can improve cross-cultural understanding and international cooperation capabilities (Rizky et al. 2023). This program is also considered superior because of the high number of participants, both inbound and outbound, compared to other MBKM activities. However, although this program is recognized as a flagship program, there are concerns about the compatibility of the courses students take in the student exchange program with the courses in their study program. This suggests improvements in the course conversion mechanism to make it more flexible and aligned with learning needs.

At the State University of Malang (UM), the implementation of MBKM also showed positive results, with students feeling that they had a more comprehensive and innovative learning experience. UM implements an MBKM package that can be adjusted to the study program, allowing students to choose activities that suit their interests and career goals. One of the innovations produced at UM is the conversion of 8-9 courses into 20 credits for MBKM activities. This allows students to utilize activities outside their study program for one semester to gain a relevant learning experience. This conversion system offers convenience for students in designing their study completion strategies, although there are still challenges in coordination between faculty and study programs related to convertible courses.

However, although MBKM offers many benefits, some challenges still need to be overcome. One of the main challenges found is the incompatibility between MBKM activities and courses taken by students (Maratis 2022). Some students report that they do not feel they are gaining experiences that meet their expectations, especially regarding academic and professional competency development. **To overcome this,** there needs to be adjustments in the design of the MBKM curriculum to be more relevant to the educational needs of students, as well as improved communication

between universities and external partners who organize MBKM activities. This aligns with the recommendations of several previous studies that emphasize the importance of better coordination between universities and partner institutions to design MBKM activities more integrated with the academic curriculum (Thahery 2023).

The implementation of the MBKM program at UNJ and UM shows differences in how the policy is carried out. At UNJ, the program runs in a more structured manner with a focus on student exchange activities and industrial internships. Meanwhile, at UM, the implementation is more flexible through activity packages that can be tailored to students' needs. These general differences provide valuable insights into how the MBKM policy can be adapted to the characteristics and resources of each university. Furthermore, although both universities implement the MBKM program, UNJ and UM take distinct approaches. UNJ emphasizes strong structure, with lecturers playing an active role in guiding students, ensuring consistency in credit conversion, and maintaining alignment with program learning outcomes. In contrast, UM offers greater flexibility by allowing students to convert several courses into MBKM credits and participate in cross-program activities. This approach encourages autonomy, interdisciplinary learning, and innovation, but it also requires students to be more independent and demands greater coordination across faculties.

The findings of this study indicate that the MBKM program contributes positively to the development of student competencies, both soft skills and professional skills. Beyond academic learning, the program facilitates self-exploration, independence, and broader personal growth. Differences in implementation between UNJ and UM highlight that flexibility and context-specific adaptation are crucial for achieving effective outcomes, as each institution applies distinct approaches that reflect their unique curriculum structures and resources.

Nevertheless, several challenges remain, particularly regarding the alignment between MBKM activities and academic curricula as well as coordination between faculties and external partners. These findings suggest that universities need to strengthen curriculum–activity integration, provide more flexible credit conversion mechanisms, and establish consistent evaluation systems to ensure sustainability. There is no single formula for MBKM implementation; universities must adapt policies according to their institutional capacities and strategic goals.

In addition, the MBKM framework also resonates with principles of Islamic education, particularly the concept of *ta'dib*, which emphasizes holistic development spanning intellectual, moral, and spiritual dimensions (Pratama and Wahyuni 2023). By promoting experiential and flexible learning, MBKM not only enhances student competencies but also nurtures independence, adaptability, empathy, and character formation aligning with the Islamic ideal of producing *insan kamil*, or well-rounded individuals who are knowledgeable, virtuous, and spiritually anchored (Susanti et al. 2023). Moreover, MBKM's emphasis on lifelong learning echoes the Islamic imperative to pursue knowledge continuously, reinforcing its relevance within Islamic higher education contexts (Huda 2019). This alignment suggests that MBKM can serve as a modern curricular innovation that simultaneously strengthens students' spiritual and ethical foundations, ensuring that educational reforms remain both culturally relevant and religiously grounded.

Building on this philosophical foundation, the practical implementation of the MBKM curriculum finds its expression in the principles of Islamic education. Its

learning concept, which emphasizes flexibility, real-world engagement, and character development, aligns with the objectives of Islamic education that go beyond knowledge transfer to include the cultivation of *akhlaq karimah* (noble character). MBKM activities such as social projects, internships, and community service can be regarded as forms of *khidmah* (service), which represents one of the core values in Islamic education. Furthermore, the spirit of lifelong learning embedded in MBKM corresponds to the concepts of *ta'lim* and *tarbiyah* in Islam, which stress the importance of seeking knowledge throughout one's life. Thus, the implementation of MBKM not only contributes to enhancing graduates' competitiveness in the workforce but also reinforces the mission of Islamic education in shaping a generation that is virtuous, competent, and able to bring benefit to society.

This study acknowledges certain limitations. The focus on only two universities and a short data collection period may limit the generalizability and fail to capture long-term impacts of MBKM. In addition, reliance on qualitative insights may not fully reflect the diversity of student experiences. Future research should therefore involve more institutions, adopt longitudinal approaches, and integrate both qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a more comprehensive evaluation.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the implementation of the MBKM curriculum in two Indonesian universities, focusing on the challenges and solutions in integrating external learning activities into academic structures. The findings indicate that MBKM implementation at the State University of Jakarta (UNJ) and the State University of Malang (UM) has successfully enhanced student competencies, particularly in soft skills and professional skills, through flexible curriculum designs, student exchange programs, internships, and entrepreneurship projects. However, challenges remain, including coordination between units, adaptation to different academic cultures, development of lecturer competencies (especially in digital technology), and the need for ongoing evaluation to maintain program quality. These findings clearly address the study's objectives by demonstrating how MBKM activities contribute to student development while also identifying areas that require improvement.

The results of this study have broader implications for higher education policy and curriculum design. Universities can strengthen MBKM implementation by enhancing curriculum flexibility, fostering collaborations with industry and external partners, aligning MBKM activities with expected learning outcomes, and integrating monitoring systems with the central MBKM portal. Moreover, this study highlights that the MBKM framework provides useful insights not only for Indonesian universities but also for higher education institutions worldwide that are seeking ways to bridge academic learning with practical, real-world experiences.

Nevertheless, this research has limitations, as it only focused on two universities, meaning that the findings may differ in other institutional or cultural contexts. Despite this, the study provides a useful foundation for further exploration. To build on these findings, future research is strongly encouraged to examine the long-term impact of MBKM on graduates' employability and competitiveness, the

effectiveness of specific MBKM activities, and innovative strategies to enhance lecturers' digital and experiential teaching competencies.

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