Smart Society: Community Service and Empowerment Journal
Volume 6, Issue 1, 203-216.
e_ISSN: 2807-5757
https://www.journal.foundae.com/index.php/smartsoc/index

Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) Policy Implementation and Learning Quality: The Role of Religious Moderation in Islamic Higher Education

Wan Jamaluddin*
Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, INDONESIA

Yuberti Yuberti
Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, INDONESIA

Nanang Supriadi
Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, INDONESIA

Bambang Budi Wiranto
Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, INDONESIA

Ardian Asyhari
Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, INDONESIA

Article Info

Article history:

Received: August 5, 2025
Revised: December 30, 2025
Accepted: March 25, 2026

Keywords:

curriculum flexibility;
institutional support;
learning quality;
MBKM policy;
religious moderation.

Abstract

This study examines the impact of the *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy implementation on learning quality in Islamic Higher Education Institutions, with particular attention to the integration of religious moderation as a value-based educational framework. Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study combines Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis of survey data from 400 students across diverse PTKIs in Indonesia with qualitative insights from 15 key informants, including lecturers and institutional leaders. The results indicate that MBKM implementation has a significant positive effect on learning quality (β=0.090, p=0.011), with curriculum flexibility (β=0.100, p=0.013), internship participation (β=0.100, p=0.030), independent projects (β=0.110, p=0.011), and technological support (β=0.120, p=0.006) contributing meaningfully to learning outcomes. Notably, institutional support emerges as the strongest predictor (β=0.700, p<0.001) and significantly mediates the relationship between MBKM components and learning quality. Qualitative findings further reveal that the effectiveness of MBKM implementation depends on the alignment between institutional policies, operational support, and the integration of religious moderation values in learning practices. This study contributes to the literature by providing an integrated empirical model linking MBKM implementation, institutional support, and learning quality within value-oriented higher education systems. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening institutional readiness, ensuring equitable program implementation, and embedding inclusive Islamic values to enhance transformative learning in pluralistic societies.

To cite this article: Jamaluddin, W., Yuberti, Y., Supriadi, N., Wiranto, B. B., & Asyhari, A. (2026). Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) Policy Implementation and Learning Quality: The Role of Religious Moderation in Islamic Higher Education. *Smart Society: Community Service and Empowerment Journal, 6*(1), 203-216. https://doi.org/10.58524/smartsociety.v6i1.849

INTRODUCTION

The Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy, launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, represents a major structural reform aimed at enhancing the relevance and quality of higher education. Through programs such as internships, student exchanges, independent studies, and community-based projects, MBKM seeks to expand

* **Corresponding author:**
Wan Jamaluddin, Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung, INDONESIA. ✉ wanjamaluddin@radenintan.ac.id

learning beyond conventional classroom boundaries and better align academic experiences with societal and labor-market demands (Amalia et al., 2023; Kuncoro, 2023). The implementation of MBKM seeks to bridge the gap between academic learning and the dynamic needs of industries and society (Kuncoro, 2023; Laga et al., 2021). Existing studies consistently highlight MBKM's potential to foster practical competence, adaptability, collaboration, and innovation among students (Riyadi et al., 2022).

Despite this growing body of research, most empirical investigations of MBKM have focused on general higher education institutions and have primarily examined outcomes related to employability, curriculum reform, or student skills development. Far less attention has been paid to Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, PTKI), which operate within a distinctive epistemological and institutional framework that integrates disciplinary knowledge with Islamic values. This omission is significant, as PTKIs are simultaneously expected to implement MBKM while advancing the national agenda of religious moderation, a core mandate of the Ministry of Religious Affairs emphasizing inclusivity, tolerance, and social harmony (Hasanah, 2023; Lazulfa & Faristiana, 2023).

Within the PTKI context, religious moderation is not merely an auxiliary value but a foundational educational orientation shaping graduate identity and social responsibility (Hasanah, 2023; Lazulfa & Faristiana, 2023). Although several studies have discussed the importance of embedding moderation values in curriculum design and student activities (Adila, 2023; Isnaini et al., 2024; Wijayanto & Wulandari, 2023), existing research tends to treat MBKM implementation and religious moderation as parallel or normative discourses, rather than examining how both are operationally integrated in shaping learning quality. Consequently, there remains limited empirical evidence on whether, and how, MBKM functions as a concrete vehicle for strengthening religious moderation within PTKIs.

Curriculum flexibility, a central pillar of MBKM, further illustrates this gap. While curriculum flexibility is widely promoted as a means of enabling cross-disciplinary learning and student autonomy, PTKIs face a unique tension between maintaining Islamic identity and accommodating academic openness (Hafizh, 2023; Yuherman et al., 2021). Prior studies acknowledge challenges related to internships and independent projects, particularly in institutions located in rural or resource-constrained contexts (Juanita et al., 2022; Sintiawati et al., 2022). However, these studies rarely examine how institutional support mechanisms mediate the relationship between curriculum flexibility, experiential learning, and learning quality within value-based educational systems. As a result, the role of institutional readiness in preventing inequality of learning opportunities remains underexplored (Bhakti et al., 2022; Awaliyah et al., 2023; Supatmi et al., 2021).

Similarly, technological support has been widely recognized as a critical enabler of MBKM implementation, particularly in facilitating flexible and student-centered learning (Irawan & Suharyati, 2023; Nuraisyiah, 2022; Oktavera, 2023). In PTKIs, digital technologies also hold strategic potential for expanding access and sustaining learning continuity in the post-pandemic era (Rambe, 2024; Sukmana, 2024). Nevertheless, prior research largely documents technological challenges descriptively—such as infrastructure gaps and digital literacy constraints—without systematically analyzing how technological support interacts with institutional support to influence learning quality (Hasanah, 2023; Nenotek, 2023; Najmi, 2023; Waziana et al., 2024).

From the perspective of religious moderation, MBKM programs, particularly student exchanges and internships in diverse social settings, offer meaningful opportunities for cultivating tolerance, inclusivity, and intercultural understanding (Dayanti & Pribadi, 2022; Najmi, 2023). However, existing studies have not sufficiently addressed the conditions under which these experiences translate into substantive learning outcomes rather than symbolic participation. The absence of empirical models linking MBKM components, institutional support, and learning quality represents a critical research gap, especially within PTKIs where value internalization is a central educational objective.

Responding to these gaps, this study positions itself at the intersection of MBKM policy implementation, learning quality, institutional support, and religious moderation within Islamic Higher Education Institutions. Unlike previous studies that focus on isolated MBKM components, this research offers an integrated analytical framework that examines both direct and mediated pathways through which curriculum flexibility, internships, independent projects, and technological

support influence learning quality. By explicitly incorporating institutional support as a key mediating mechanism, this study advances current scholarship by explaining how MBKM operates in practice within value-oriented higher education systems.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, this study contributes theoretically by extending MBKM implementation research into the domain of Islamic higher education and religious moderation, and practically by providing evidence-based insights for strengthening institutional readiness and policy alignment. In doing so, the research not only addresses an underexplored empirical context but also clarifies the role of institutional ecosystems in ensuring that MBKM fulfills its transformative promise in pluralistic and value-based educational settings.

METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to obtain a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy within Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam, PTKI). The mixed-methods strategy was selected to integrate statistically measurable relationships with in-depth contextual insights, thereby capturing both the structural and experiential dimensions of policy implementation. Following the recommendations of Creswell and Creswell (2023), the study adopted an explanatory sequential design, in which quantitative findings served as the primary phase and were subsequently elaborated through qualitative inquiry.

The overall research design and the integration logic between the quantitative and qualitative phases are illustrated in Figure 1.

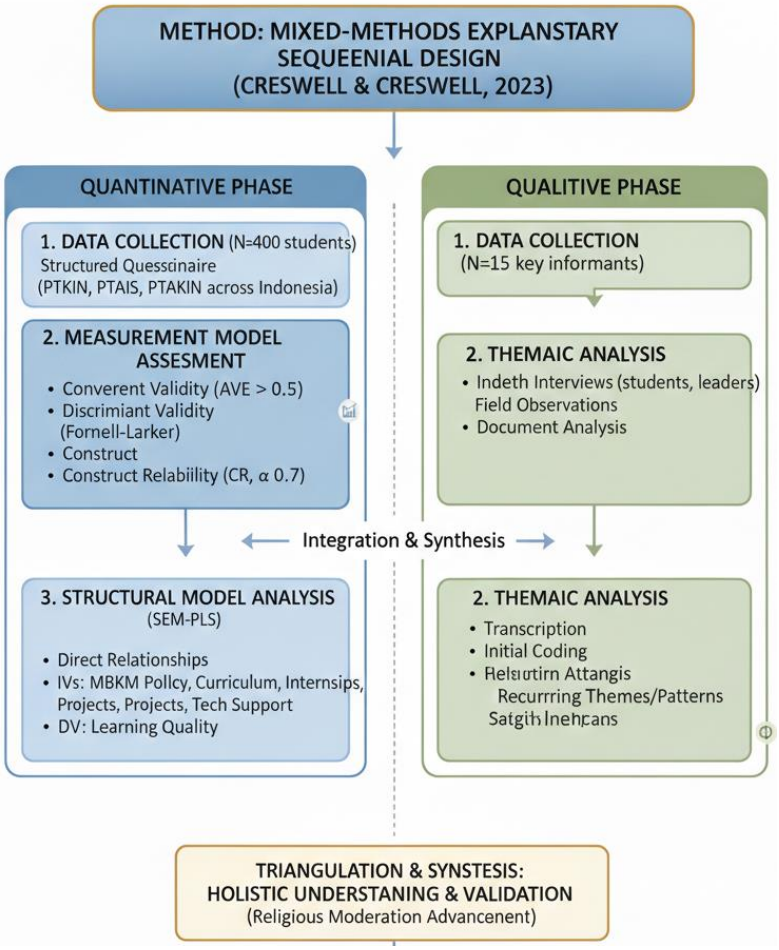

Figure 1. Explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design framework (adapted from Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

As depicted in Figure 1, the research commenced with a quantitative phase aimed at examining the structural relationships among key MBKM components and learning quality. Quantitative data

were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 400 students from PTKIs across western, central, and eastern Indonesia. Proportional stratified random sampling was employed to ensure representation across institutional types (PTKIN, PTAIS, and PTAKIN). The instrument captured students' perceptions of MBKM policy implementation, curriculum flexibility, internship participation, independent project engagement, technological learning support, institutional support, and perceived learning quality.

The quantitative analysis followed a two-step procedure. First, the measurement model was evaluated to ensure psychometric robustness, including convergent validity (Average Variance Extracted > 0.5), discriminant validity (Fornell–Larcker criterion), and construct reliability using Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (threshold > 0.7). Second, the structural model was analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) to test direct relationships between MBKM-related variables and learning quality, as well as the moderating role of institutional support.

Building on the quantitative results, the study proceeded to the qualitative phase, as outlined in Figure 1. Qualitative data were obtained from 15 purposively selected key informants, including students, lecturers, program heads, and university leaders who were directly involved in or knowledgeable about MBKM implementation. Data collection methods comprised in-depth interviews, field observations at selected PTKIs, and document analysis of institutional guidelines, MBKM implementation reports, and policy documents. These sources were used to explore implementation challenges, institutional practices, and the integration of religious moderation values within MBKM activities.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through a systematic process involving transcription, initial coding, theme development, and the identification of recurring patterns across data sources. The qualitative findings were then integrated with the quantitative results through triangulation and synthesis, allowing the researchers to contextualize statistical relationships and explain variations observed in the quantitative phase.

As reflected in Figure 1, this final stage of integration and synthesis enabled a holistic validation of findings and supported a deeper interpretation of how MBKM implementation, institutional support, and learning quality interact within PTKIs. Through this sequential and integrative procedure, the study not only established empirically grounded relationships but also provided contextual explanations relevant to the advancement of religious moderation as a core educational orientation in Islamic higher education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section articulates a detailed and analytical exposition of the study's findings, integrating quantitative results derived from Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with qualitative insights obtained through in-depth interviews. The discussion unfolds thematically to reflect the complexity of implementing the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy within the specific epistemic and sociocultural framework of Islamic Higher Education Institutions, emphasizing both systemic strengths and emergent challenges.

Descriptive Profile and Validation of the Measurement Model

The study involved a robust sample of 400 students representing 32 diverse academic programs across PTKIs in Indonesia who had participated in various MBKM initiatives. As shown in Table 1, the sample is demographically diverse and methodologically representative.

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Study Program

Study Program	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Islamic Library and Information Science	8	2.00
Islamic Civilization History	9	2.25
Islamic Religious Education	19	4.75
Arabic Language Education	16	4.00
Islamic Education Management	16	4.00
English Language Education	17	4.25
Biology Education	14	3.50
Physics Education	15	3.75

Study Program	Number of Students	Percentage (%)
Guidance and Counseling	12	3.00
Mathematics Education	13	3.25
Early Childhood Education	12	3.00
Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Teacher Education	15	3.75
Biology	12	3.00
Information Systems	9	2.25
Sharia Economics	13	3.25
Sharia Banking	8	2.00
Sharia Accounting	9	2.25
Sharia Business Management	10	2.50
Islamic Communication and Broadcasting	14	3.50
Islamic Community Development	8	2.00
Da'wah Management	9	2.25
Islamic Guidance and Counseling	17	4.25
Comparative Religion Studies	10	2.50
Islamic Theology and Philosophy	13	3.25
Islamic Political Thought	14	3.50
Qur'anic Studies and Exegesis	13	3.25
Sociology of Religion	17	4.25
Islamic Psychology	10	2.50
Sufism and Psychotherapy	12	3.00
Sharia Economic Law	12	3.00
Constitutional Law	12	3.00
Islamic Family Law (Ahwal Syakhshiyyah)	12	3.00

Descriptive statistics in Table 2 reveal an encouraging trend, with students expressing high agreement on most indicators, scoring an average of 3.95 to 4.05 on a five-point Likert scale. Particularly, Independent Project Activities (IPA) attained the highest mean score (M = 4.05), underscoring students' appreciation of experiential and autonomous learning experiences.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Variables

No	Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
1	MBKM Policy Implementation (PI)	3.99	0.82	3.0	5.0
2	Curriculum Flexibility (CF)	3.96	0.82	3.0	5.0
3	Internship Participation (PIP)	3.95	0.82	3.0	5.0
4	Independent Project Activities (IPA)	4.05	0.81	3.0	5.0
5	Learning Technology Support (LTS)	3.98	0.82	3.0	5.0
6	Institutional Support (IS)	3.99	0.83	3.0	5.0
7	Learning Quality (LQ)	3.99	0.83	3.0	5.0

Psychometric rigor was ensured through comprehensive measurement validation. Table 3 demonstrates that all constructs surpassed the minimum reliability thresholds, with Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values exceeding 0.7, indicating internal consistency.

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity Test Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Institutional Support	0.985	0.985	0.987	0.893
Learning Technology Support	0.983	1.000	0.983	0.868
Curriculum Flexibility	0.988	1.006	0.989	0.882
MBKM Policy Implementation	0.991	0.721	0.989	0.849
Independent Project Activities	0.987	0.990	0.987	0.861
Learning Quality	0.989	0.989	0.990	0.891
Internship Participation	0.988	1.042	0.989	0.880

Convergent validity was also established, with Average Variance Extracted (AVE) above 0.5 across constructs. Discriminant validity, assessed using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Table 4), confirms the conceptual distinctiveness of each construct. The model's global fit indices (Table 5) —

SRMR of 0.065 and NFI of 0.960 — validate a strong structural model, aligning with the standards articulated by Hair et al. (2022) for PLS-SEM fit measures.

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Test Results (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

Variable	IS	LTS	CF	PI	IPA	LQ	PIP
Institutional Support (IS)	0.945						
Learning Technology Support (LTS)	0.135	0.932					
Curriculum Flexibility (CF)	0.147	0.120	0.939				
MBKM Policy Implementation (PI)	0.112	0.117	0.083	0.921			
Independent Project Activities (IPA)	0.133	0.095	0.120	0.097	0.928		
Learning Quality (LQ)	0.620	0.142	0.153	0.121	0.137	0.944	
Internship Participation (PIP)	0.102	0.097	0.093	0.087	0.090	0.108	0.938

Table 5. Model Fit Test Results

Model Fit Index	Saturated Model	Estimated Model	Ideal Criterion	Remarks
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Residual)	0.065	0.065	< 0.08	Good
d_ULS (Unweighted Least Squares)	1.850	1.850	Lower is better	Requires bootstrap for validation
d_G (Geodesic Distance)	1.750	1.750	Lower is better	Requires bootstrap for validation
Chi-Square	2100.000	2100.000	Lower is better	Depends on degrees of freedom & p-value
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.960	0.960	> 0.90	Good
RMS Theta	–	0.094	< 0.12 (reflective models)	Good

Institutional Support as the Cornerstone of Learning Transformation

The path coefficient analysis, visualized in Figure 2 and detailed in Table 6, reveals Institutional Support as the strongest direct predictor of Learning Quality (β = 0.700, p < 0.001).

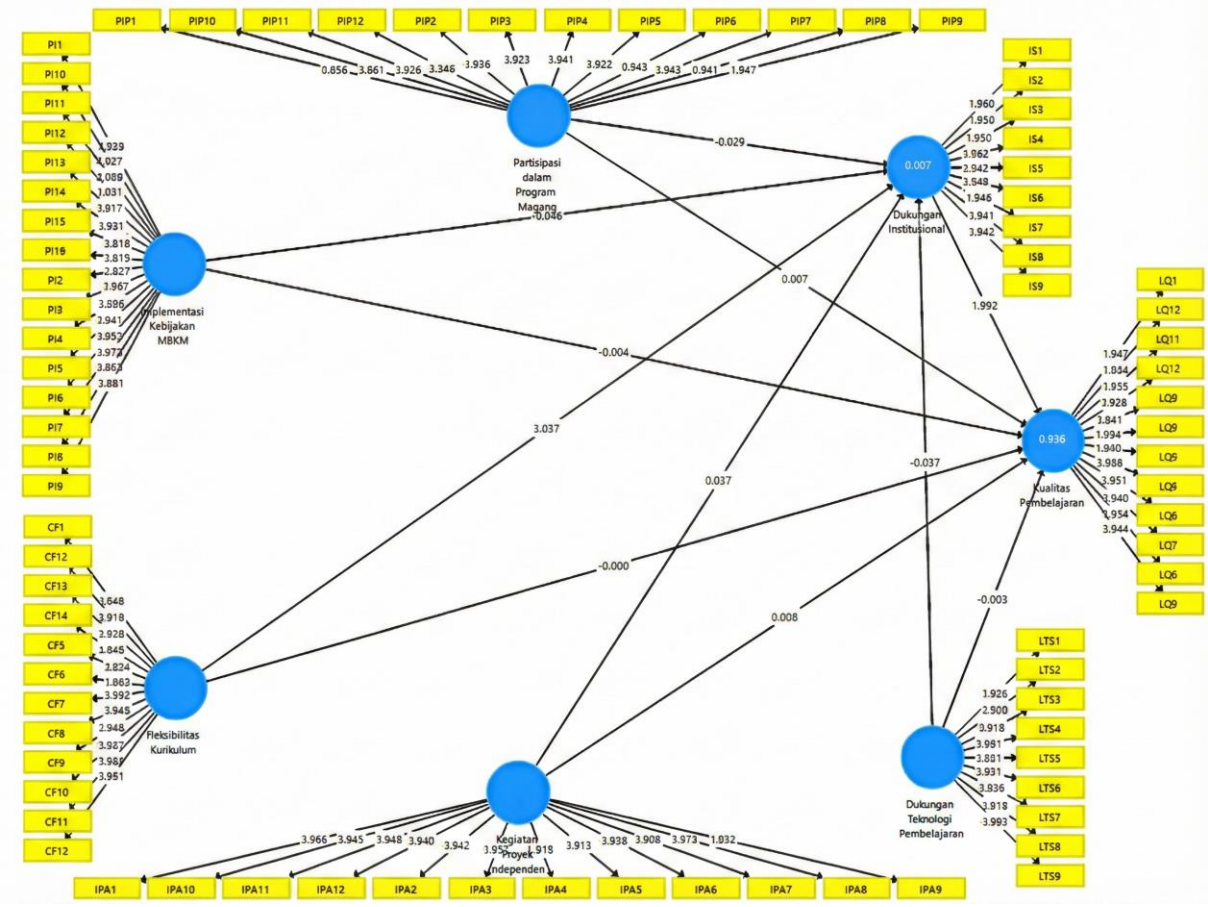

Figure 2. Structural Model with Path Coefficients

This striking result affirms the institutional ecosystem's decisive role in translating MBKM policy into meaningful educational practice. The significance of this finding is amplified by implementation theory, which suggests that institutional readiness and administrative alignment are prerequisites for policy efficacy (Birken et al., 2023).

Table 6. Direct Effect Testing Results (Path Coefficients)

No	Path Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Description
1	Institutional Support → Learning Quality	0.700	0.695	0.045	15.556	0.000	Significant
2	Technological Support → Institutional Support	0.240	0.235	0.067	3.582	0.000	Significant
3	Technological Support → Learning Quality	0.120	0.118	0.044	2.727	0.006	Significant
4	Curriculum Flexibility → Institutional Support	0.150	0.148	0.061	2.459	0.014	Significant
5	Curriculum Flexibility → Learning Quality	0.100	0.098	0.040	2.500	0.013	Significant
6	MBKM Policy Implementation → Institutional Support	0.180	0.177	0.069	2.609	0.010	Significant
7	MBKM Policy Implementation → Learning Quality	0.090	0.088	0.035	2.571	0.011	Significant
8	Independent Projects → Institutional Support	0.200	0.198	0.070	2.857	0.005	Significant
9	Independent Projects → Learning Quality	0.110	0.108	0.043	2.558	0.011	Significant
10	Internship Participation → Institutional Support	0.130	0.128	0.062	2.097	0.037	Significant
11	Internship Participation → Learning Quality	0.100	0.097	0.046	2.174	0.030	Significant

Qualitative evidence (Table 11) supports this conclusion, revealing that while macro-level support—such as strategic MoUs and financial allocation—exists, students and faculty most acutely experience the absence or presence of practical, operational support. This aligns with Hidayat's (2024) assertion that successful MBKM implementation at PTKI requires institutional proactiveness at both the policy and pedagogical levels. Moreover, the mediating role of Institutional Support is statistically affirmed (Table 7), as it significantly enhances the influence of other constructs—such as curriculum flexibility, internship participation, and technology support—on learning quality. This finding resonates with Barua and Lockee's (2024) proposition that institutional scaffolding can potentiate the outcomes of decentralized educational innovations.

Table 7. Indirect Effect Testing Results

No	Indirect Path Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Description
1	Technological Support → Institutional Support → Learning Quality	0.168	0.165	0.059	2.847	0.005	Significant
2	Curriculum Flexibility → Institutional Support → Learning Quality	0.105	0.102	0.043	2.442	0.015	Significant
3	MBKM Policy Implementation → Institutional Support → Learning Quality	0.126	0.122	0.049	2.571	0.011	Significant

No	Indirect Path Relationship	Original Sample (O)	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T-Statistic	P-Value	Description
4	Independent Projects → Institutional Support → Learning Quality	0.140	0.137	0.055	2.545	0.012	Significant
5	Internship Participation → Institutional Support → Learning Quality	0.091	0.089	0.041	2.220	0.027	Significant

Experiential Learning through Internships and Independent Projects

Experiential learning proves instrumental in shaping students' academic and personal development. Internship Participation (β = 0.100, p = 0.030) and Independent Projects (β = 0.110, p = 0.011) exhibit statistically significant effects on Learning Quality (Table 6), a finding consistent with Kolb's (2015) experiential learning model which underscores reflection on direct experience as critical to deep learning.

In-depth interviews (Table 11) reveal that students perceive these programs as transformative arenas not only for skill acquisition but also for the internalization of values such as religious moderation, tolerance, and professionalism. As Hasan and Juhannis (2024) emphasize, such learning environments enable the enactment of theoretical constructs into sociocultural praxis. However, concerns regarding program inequity persist; the quality of internship placements varies, leading to disparate student experiences. Cluster analysis (Figure 3) further underscores this disparity, showing that Cluster 1 students—those experiencing moderate participation but low institutional support—report the lowest perceived learning quality. This finding cautions against the mere expansion of programs without ensuring quality assurance mechanisms, echoing Alshammari et al.'s (2025) critique of superficial implementation in decentralized educational contexts.

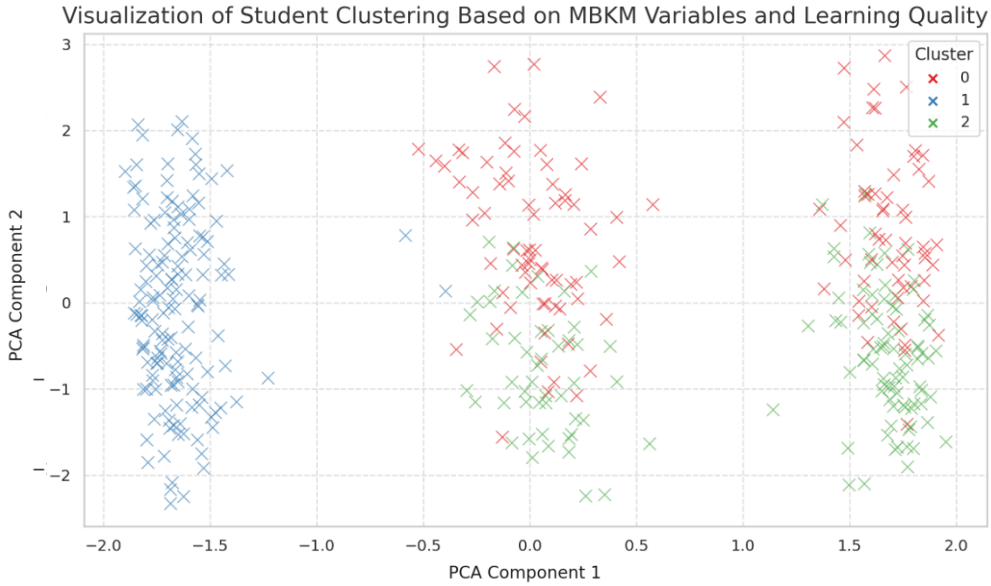

Figure 3. Visualization of Student Clustering

Synergistic Roles of Curriculum Flexibility and Learning Technology Support

Curriculum Flexibility (β = 0.100, p = 0.013) and Learning Technology Support (β = 0.120, p = 0.006) are both identified as significant contributors to Learning Quality (Table 6). The former serves as the structural backbone of MBKM, empowering students to pursue inter- and trans-disciplinary trajectories. In the PTKI context, this requires a delicate equilibrium between epistemological openness and doctrinal integrity (Khotimah & Susanti, 2025). As Afriadi and Fitri (2025) argue, such flexibility must be undergirded by robust academic advisement and ideological anchoring.

Learning Technology Support emerges as a critical operational determinant. Table 8 reveals a significant ANOVA difference in technology support across clusters (F = 165.98, p < 0.001), with Cluster 2—the high-performing group—reporting superior access and satisfaction. As Syahrin

(2025) notes, digital ecosystems serve as both content delivery tools and cultural habitats for identity formation. Yet, qualitative findings point to a persistent digital divide and lack of techno-pedagogical training, a concern validated by Nermend et al. (2022), who stress that infrastructural inequities can entrench educational disparities rather than ameliorate them.

Table 8. ANOVA Results Across Clusters

Variable	F-Value	p-Value	Significance
PI_AVG	1.13	0.324	Not significant
CF_AVG	0.85	0.427	Not significant
PIP_AVG	18.30	< .001	Significant
IPA_AVG	3.95	.019	Significant
LTS_AVG	165.98	< .001	Highly significant
IS_AVG	–	Used as clustering basis	
LQ_AVG	–	Clearly separated among clusters	

Notes: PI_AVG: MBKM Policy Implementation; CF_AVG: Curriculum Flexibility; PIP_AVG: Internship Participation; IPA_AVG: Independent Project Activities; LTS_AVG: Learning Technology Support; IS_AVG: Institutional Support; LQ_AVG: Learning Quality

Uneven Impact: Interdepartmental and Interstudent Variations

Analysis of variance across academic programs reveals significant differences in perceived Learning Quality (F = 1.91, p = 0.0078; Table 9). As illustrated in Figure 4, such heterogeneity suggests that departmental interpretations of MBKM policy vary widely, shaped by leadership orientation, faculty capacity, and institutional culture.

Table 9. ANOVA Results of Learning Quality Across Study Programs

Test Type	Test Statistic	*p*-value	Description
Normality (Shapiro–Wilk)	Varies by program	Most > .05	Most study programs have normal distribution
Homogeneity (Levene's Test)	1.33	.154	Homogeneous variance across programs
ANOVA (Between Programs)	1.91	.0078	Significant differences among study programs

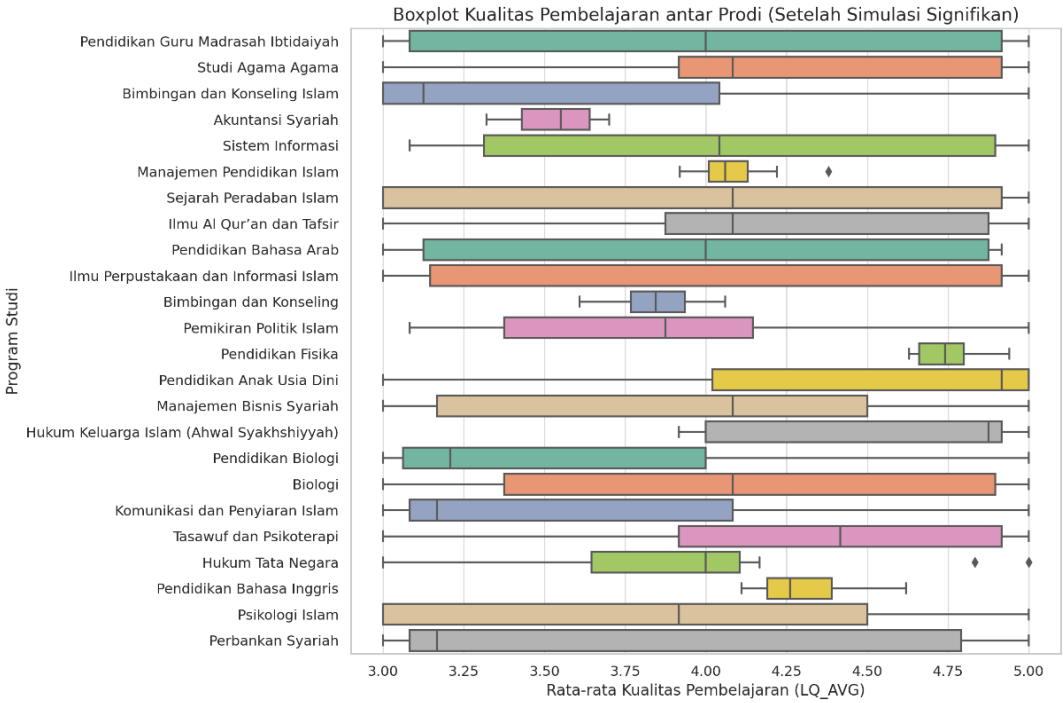

Figure 4. Boxplot of Learning Quality Between Study Programs

Cluster segmentation (Table 10 and Figure 3) sharpens this insight. Three distinct clusters emerged: Cluster 2 (High Achievers), Cluster 3 (Moderate Adopters), and Cluster 1 (Underserved). The latter, representing the largest cohort, underscores the urgent need for equity-driven reforms.

Table 10. Student Cluster Characteristics

Cluster	General Description	n	Characteristics
0	High in PIP & IS	125	Very active in internships and feel strong institutional support, with high perceived learning quality.
1	Average in all variables, low IS	144	Students with moderate experiences but perceive weak institutional support. Report the lowest learning quality.
2	High in all variables	131	Outstanding students across all aspects, with very high technological support, institutional support, and perceived learning quality.

Note:
PIP = Internship Participation, IS = Institutional Support.

Strategic Recommendations for PTKI Reform

Synthesizing these findings reveals a clear trajectory for institutional enhancement. First, Institutional Governance must be strengthened through visionary leadership and systemic support (Hidayat, 2024; Rahman, 2025). Second, curricula must integrate Islamic moderation values (wasathiyyah) alongside MBKM flexibility (Ni'am, 2023). Third, partnerships for internships and projects must be curated with quality assurance in mind (Fadli et al., 2024). Finally, equitable digital transformation requires not just infrastructure, but sustained training and cultural adaptation (Abdurrohman & Fitriana, 2023).

In essence, while MBKM presents a transformative policy framework, its successful realization in PTKIs hinges upon strategic institutional alignment, pedagogical intentionality, and cultural responsiveness. The opportunity before PTKIs is not merely to implement a national policy, but to indigenize it embedding within it the spiritual, intellectual, and civic virtues that define Islamic higher education.

Table 11. Thematic Summary of Qualitative Interview Findings

Main Theme	University/Faulty Leadership Perspective	Lecturers & Program Heads' Perspective	Student Perspective
Vision and Policy on Religious Moderation Integration	Strong at the Top, Varied Below: The university's vision to be a center of religious moderation is firm at the rectorate level. However, deans interpret it differently—some focus on character education, others on employment relevance.	Aware but Awaiting Technical Guidelines: Most lecturers acknowledge the overarching vision but feel that clear technical guidance is lacking. Implementation is often left to individual creativity.	Polarized Understanding: Student understanding varies significantly. Some are well-informed and trained (mainly Cluster 2), while many only recognize the term from media or have never heard it in the MBKM context (mainly Cluster 1).
Curriculum and Program Implementation	Delegation and Faculty Autonomy: Policies from the university tend to be macro-level, granting faculties autonomy. This fosters innovation in some, but inconsistency in others.	Wide Implementation Spectrum: Varies from innovative lecturers designing interfaith projects to overburdened lecturers who make no curriculum changes.	"Hit-or-Miss" Experience: Student experiences depend on their study program and supervisor. Some engage in transformative programs; others are assigned irrelevant or administrative tasks.
Role and Forms of Institutional Support	Macro and Symbolic Support: Provided through general policies, block grant allocations, strategic MoUs, and branding efforts.	Need for Micro and Practical Support: Lecturers feel supported when provided with clear guidelines,	Tangible Student Support: Students feel supported through centralized information, smooth administration,

	However, monitoring and standardization are noted as challenges.	incentives, reduced workloads, and partnership assistance. Without these, MBKM is viewed as an extra burden.	caring academic advisors, and quality internships.
Impact and Value Internalization	Optimistic yet Realistic: Leaders are optimistic about positive impacts but acknowledge that character change is hard to measure and varies. A deeper evaluation is needed.	Depends on Individual and Context: Students in challenging environments develop better. Otherwise, little value internalization occurs.	Significant Change vs. No Impact: Some report becoming more open and tolerant. Others, especially those with poor placements, report no change.
Key Challenges Faced	Policy-Implementation Gap: Translating the macro vision into uniform and high-quality practices across programs is a major challenge, along with assessing affective outcomes.	Workload and Resource Constraints: Main issues include high workloads, lack of incentives for mentoring, and difficulty finding external partners who support both competence and character goals.	Administrative Uncertainty & Program Quality: Students struggle with unclear information, bureaucratic complexity (e.g., credit conversion), unresponsive supervisors, and poor program placements.

LIMITATION

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, while the integration of quantitative and qualitative data strengthens the findings, the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretations regarding the influence of MBKM variables and institutional support on perceived learning quality. Second, the clustering and PLS-SEM analyses rely on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability and response biases. Third, despite efforts to involve diverse programs across Islamic Higher Education Institutions, generalizability remains constrained due to contextual differences and the dominance of certain disciplines in the sample. Lastly, the implementation of religious moderation values was explored through perceptions rather than direct classroom or curriculum observation, which may not fully capture its pedagogical depth and consistency.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy significantly enhances the perceived quality of learning in Islamic Higher Education Institutions, particularly when supported by flexible curricula, independent project activities, internship participation, and robust technological and institutional support. The structural model confirms both direct and indirect pathways through which these components influence learning outcomes, with institutional support serving as a critical mediating factor. Furthermore, clustering analysis reveals distinct student profiles based on levels of engagement and institutional support, underscoring the need for differentiated strategies to ensure inclusive and equitable learning experiences. These findings highlight the importance of harmonizing policy vision with practical implementation and reinforcing institutional mechanisms to optimize student-centered learning in the post-pandemic higher education landscape.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

WJ contributed to conceptualization, supervision, and writing. YY was responsible for methodology, investigation, and data accuration. NS contributed to formal analysis and validation. BBW handled resources, project administration, and data collection. AA contributed to the visualization, software, and writing the manuscript.

REFERENCES

Abdurrohman, F., & Fitriana, A. A. (2023). The role of digital literacy in strengthening student religious moderation. Annual International Conference on Islamic Education for Students, 2(1), 238–247. https://conferences.uinsalatiga.ac.id/index.php/aicoies/article/view/573

Adila, N. S. (2023). Problematika Implementasi Kurikulum MBKM (Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka) Di Program Studi Pgmi Iain Palagkaraya. JRPD (Jurnal Riset Pendidikan Dasar), 6(1), 77–83. https://doi.org/10.26618/jrpd.v6i1.9810

Afriadi, B., & Fitri, F. (2025). Reconstructing Civic Education in the Context of National Identity and Cultural Pluralism: A Conceptual Study. International Education Trend Issues, 3(1), 9–17.

Ali, M. (2023). Konsep Implementasi Penguatan Moderasi Beragama Melalui Tripusat Pendidikan. Al-I Tibar Jurnal Pendidikan Islam, 10(1), 50–54. https://doi.org/10.30599/jpia.v10i1.2122

Alshammari, A. E., Ahmed, H. M. S., Al-Bukhrani, M. A., Thomran, M., Grada, M., Khojally, H. M. A., & Al-Gobaei, F. (2025). The interplay of internship education, IT skills, and graduates' employability in saudi arabia: Experiential learning theory lens. Quality & Quantity. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-025-02120-y

Amalia, N., Suprapti, T., & Dwilestari, G. (2023). Analisis Sentimen Pengguna Twitter Terhadap Pelaksanaan Kurikulum MBKM. E-Link Jurnal Teknik Elektro Dan Informatika, 18(1), 57. https://doi.org/10.30587/e-link.v18i1.5335

Awaliyah, D. F., Wardati, K., Fatimah, S., Futhona, A. K., & Chasanah, S. I. U. (2023). Supporting Akreditasi LAM Teknik: Evaluasi Implementasi MBKM di Fakultas Saintek UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. Media Penelitian Pendidikan : Jurnal Penelitian Dalam Bidang Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran, 17(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.26877/mpp.v17i1.14311

Barua, L., & Lockee, B. B. (2024). A review of strategies to incorporate flexibility in higher education course designs. Discover Education, 3(1), 127. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44217-024-00213-8

Bhakti, Y. B., Simorangkir, M. R. R., Tjalla, A., & Sutisna, A. (2022). Kendala Implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (Mbkm) Di Perguruan Tinggi. Research and Development Journal of Education, 8(2), 783. https://doi.org/10.30998/rdje.v8i2.12865

Birken, S. A., Wagi, C. R., Peluso, A. G., Kegler, M. C., Baloh, J., Adsul, P., Fernandez, M. E., Masud, M., Huang, T. T.-K., Lee, M., Wangen, M., Nilsen, P., Bender, M., Choy-Brown, M., Ryan, G., Randazzo, A., & Ko, L. K. (2023). Toward a more comprehensive understanding of organizational influences on implementation: The organization theory for implementation science framework. *Frontiers in Health Services, 3*, 1142598. https://doi.org/10.3389/frhs.2023.1142598

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2023). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches (Sixth Edition). Sage publications.

Dayanti, F., & Pribadi, F. (2022). Dukungan Sosial Keluarga Penyandang Disabilitas Dalam Keterbukaan Akses Menempuh Pendidikan. Sosiohumaniora Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora, 8(1), 46–53. https://doi.org/10.30738/sosio.v8i1.11481

Fadli, M., Hanum, L., Amri, K., & Rusli, R. (2024). Barriers and Strategies: Analysis of the Implementation of Independent Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) at PTKI in Aceh. QALAMUNA: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Agama, 16(2), 1101–1114.

Hafizh, M. (2023). Konsep Desain Pengembangan Kurikulum Dan Relevansinya Pada Pendidikan Islam. Anthor Education and Learning Journal, 2(5), 600–606. https://doi.org/10.31004/anthor.v1i5.192

Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.

Hasan, K., & Juhannis, H. (2024). Religious education and moderation: A bibliometric analysis. Cogent Education, 11(1), 2292885. https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2023.2292885

Hasanah, I. F. (2023). MBKM Dan Kreativitas Pengajar Dalam Pengembangan Materi Ajar Di Perguruan Tinggi Islam. Mawa Izh Jurnal Dakwah Dan Pengembangan Sosial Kemanusiaan, 10(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.32923/tarbawy.v10i1.3353

Hidayat, R. (2024). The fusion of the Bologna Process, Liberal Arts Education, and Indonesian educational transformation ideas in the MBKM policy. Journal of Governance and Local Politics (JGLP), 6(1), 11–24.

Insannia, R. C., Handika, P., Wibisono, S. S., Wahyuni, E., Febrianti, L. C., Utama, R. S., Manziz, I., & Martono, N. (2024). Persepsi Alumni Sosiologi FISIP Unsoed Mengenai Implementasi Program MBKM. Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat Nusantara, 6(1), 2397–2404. https://doi.org/10.55338/jpkmn.v6i1.4831

Irawan, A., & Suharyati, H. (2023). Analisis Dampak Kebijakan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) pada Perguruan Tinggi: Literatur Review. Research and Development Journal of Education, 9(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.30998/rdje.v9i2.19419

Isnaini, R. L., Hidayati, W., & Arifin, Z. (2024). Unlocking Success: Key Factors for International Mobility Program in Implementing the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka Curriculum. Nidhomul Haq : Jurnal Manajemen Pendidikan Islam, 9(2), Article 2. https://doi.org/10.31538/ndh.v9i2.4681

Juanita, J., Iskahar, I., Jazuli, A., & Anjarwati, S. (2022). Persepsi Pelaksanaan MBKM Prodi Teknik Sipil Tinjauan Mahasiswa, Dosen Dan Mitra. Techno (Jurnal Fakultas Teknik Universitas Muhammadiyah Purwokerto), 23(1). https://doi.org/10.30595/techno.v23i1.12592

Khotimah, K., & Susanti, A. I. (2025). Implementasi dan Tantangan Kebijakan Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka di Perguruan Tinggi Indonesia. Cetta: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, 8(2), 126–140.

Kolb, D. A. (2014). Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development. FT press. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=jpbeBQAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR7&dq=Kolb,+D.+A.+(1984).+Experiential+Learning:+Experience+as+the+Source+of+Learning+and+Development.+Prentice+Hall.&ots=Vp5RpQ3WNi&sig=hgH6vsZy1q1XRkZ7VT_8wC5mNTU

Kuncoro, K. S. (2023). Empirical Study of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program's Impact on Soft Skills Development Among University Students. Buana Pendidikan Jurnal Fakultas Keguruan Dan Ilmu Pendidikan, 19(2), 214–222. https://doi.org/10.36456/bp.vol19.no2.a7293

Laga, Y., Nona, R. V., Langga, L., & Jamu, M. E. (2021). Persepsi Mahasiswa Terhadap Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). Edukatif Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, 4(1), 699–706. https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v4i1.1951

Lazulfa, H. L., & Faristiana, A. R. (2023). Strategi Mainstreaming Moderasi Beragama di Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Melalui Media Sosial. Dewantara Jurnal Pendidikan Sosial Humaniora, 2(1), 16–33. https://doi.org/10.30640/dewantara.v2i1.606

Najmi, H. (2023). Pendidikan Moderasi Beragama Dan Implikasinya Terhadap Sikap Sosial Peserta Didik. Al-Muttaqin, 9(1), 17–25. https://doi.org/10.37567/al-muttaqin.v9i1.2067

Nenotek, S. A. (2023). Kesiapan Guru Dalam Pembelajaran Berbasis Teknologi di Perbatasan Indonesia-Timor Leste. Edukatif Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, 5(5), 1975–1984. https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v5i5.5462

Nermend, M., Singh, S., & Singh, U. S. (2022). An evaluation of decision on paradigm shift in higher education by digital transformation. Procedia Computer Science, 207, 1959–1969.

Ni'am, S. (2023). Islam, Moderation, and Prospects Indonesian. Proceedings of the 1st Annual Conference of Islamic Education (ACIE 2022), 714, 161. https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=nve6EAAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA161&dq=PTKI+must+be+at+the+forefront+of+grounding+moderate+Islam+in+academic+and+social+spaces.&ots=3sEUZMVmTU&sig=2NdPwEIbf-5bUwRHbg7bdVoUxmw

Nuraisyiah, N. (2022). Tantangan Pengembangan Kurikulum Dalam Meningkatkan Literasi Digital Serta Pembentukan Karakter Peserta Didik Di Indonesia. Jurnal Basicedu, 6(4), 6844–6854. https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i4.3328

Oktavera, S. (2023). Pendidikan Dan Relevansinya Terhadap Ict. Tarbawi : Jurnal Pemikiran Dan Pendidikan Islam, 6(1), 13–22. https://doi.org/10.51476/tarbawi.v6i1.450

Rahman, G. (2025). Transforming Islamic Education Through Value-Based Leadership: A Narrative Review. Sinergi International Journal of Islamic Studies, 3(2), 83–95.

Rambe, A. (2024). Reformasi Pendidikan Muhammadiyah: Pendekatan Inovatif Dalam Menghadapi Tantangan Era Digital. Jurnal Ilmiah Muqoddimah Jurnal Ilmu Sosial Politik Dan Hummaniora, 8(2), 806. https://doi.org/10.31604/jim.v8i2.2024.806-812

Rasmanah, C. (2024). Evaluasi Implementasi Kurikulum. Sosiosaintika, 2(1), 1–7. https://doi.org/10.59996/sosiosaintika.v2i1.319

Riyadi, S., Harimurti, R. S., & Ikhsan, J. (2022). Dampak Implementasi MBKM Terhadap Pengembangan Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta Menuju Research Excellence University. Edukatif Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, 4(1), 1018–1029. https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v4i1.1991

Sintiawati, N., Fajarwati, S. R., Mulyanto, A., Muttaqien, K., & Suherman, M. (2022). Partisipasi Civitas Akademik dalam Implementasi Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). Jurnal Basicedu, 6(1), Article 1. https://doi.org/10.31004/basicedu.v6i1.2036

Sukmana, H. T. (2024). Implementasi Pembelajaran Jarak Jauh di Fakultas Sains Dan Teknologi Pasca Covid-19. Jurnal Mentari Manajemen Pendidikan Dan Teknologi Informasi, 2(2), 163–175. https://doi.org/10.33050/mentari.v2i2.487

Supatmi, S., Herdiana, B., Utama, J., Pohan, M. A. R., & Rahajoeningroem, T. (2021). Analisis Hasil Survei SPADA Dikti 2021 Dan Dampaknya Terhadap Rekomendasi Kebijakan Implementasi Kampus Merdeka. Edukatif Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan, 4(1), 732–746. https://doi.org/10.31004/edukatif.v4i1.1894

Syahrin, M. A. (2025). The Transformation of Islamic Religious Education in The Face of Religious Moderation in The Digital Era. Jurnal Pedagogy, 18(1), 19–26.

Tikader, B., & Mandal, B. (2025). Educating the Heart and Mind: Linking Value-Based Education for Psychological Wellbeing. International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Arts, Science and Technology, 3(5), 34–50.

Waziana, W., Sari, D. N., Rahshel, Y., Saputra, R. H., & Pratomo, P. A. (2024). Inovasi pembelajaran technopreneurship melalui implementasi merdeka belajar-kampus merdeka (MBKM). Jurnal Abdi Insani, 11(4), 2208–2217. https://doi.org/10.29303/abdiinsani.v11i4.2096

Wijayanto, B., & Wulandari, F. (2023). Implementasi Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka: Systematic Review. Jurnal Pipsi (Jurnal Pendidikan Ips Indonesia), 8(2), 164. https://doi.org/10.26737/jpipsi.v8i2.4285

Yuherman, Y., Nugroho, W., & Sunarsi, D. (2021). Dampak Kebijakan MBKM Pada Kesiapan Sumber Daya Manusia dan Fasilitas Fakultas Hukum Usahid Jakarta. Morality Jurnal Ilmu Hukum, 7(2), 222. https://doi.org/10.52947/morality.v7i2.235