

Challenges in Implementing The "Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom" Curriculum To Shape Citizens With Religious and Nationalistic Characters



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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tantangan dalam implementasi kurikulum "Merdeka Belajar, Kampus Merdeka" (MBKM) dalam membentuk karakter religius dan nasionalis mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi Indonesia. Pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain tinjauan literatur digunakan untuk mengumpulkan dan menganalisis referensi berdasarkan kriteria relevansi topik, kebaruan publikasi, dan keberagaman perspektif. Analisis tematik diterapkan untuk mengidentifikasi isu utama yang muncul, dengan mengedepankan refleksi kritis dan diskusi sejawat guna mengurangi potensi bias. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa kurikulum MBKM memiliki potensi dalam memperkuat karakter religius dan nasionalis mahasiswa melalui pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman yang fleksibel, kontekstual, dan lintas disiplin. Namun, tantangan muncul dalam integrasi nilai-nilai keagamaan dan kebangsaan, kesiapan sumber daya manusia, inklusivitas pembelajaran, serta penyesuaian dengan prinsip pluralisme dan regulasi pendidikan nasional. Oleh karena itu, dibutuhkan peninjauan kurikulum secara berkelanjutan serta pendekatan etis yang bijak untuk memastikan implementasi MBKM selaras dengan kebutuhan sosial, nilai-nilai masyarakat, dan arah pembangunan karakter bangsa.

Keywords:

Independent Learning

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Character

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges in implementing the "Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom" (MBKM) curriculum in shaping students' religious and nationalistic characters within Indonesia's higher education system. A qualitative approach with a literature review design was employed, selecting sources based on topic relevance, recency of publication, and diversity of viewpoints. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key issues, with critical reflection and peer discussions used to reduce potential bias. The findings suggest that the MBKM curriculum holds significant potential in fostering students' religious and nationalistic values through experiential, contextual, and interdisciplinary learning opportunities. However, implementation faces multiple challenges, including the integration of religious and national values, the readiness of human resources, inclusive learning practices, and alignment with pluralistic principles and educational regulations. Continuous curriculum evaluation and a balanced ethical approach are required to ensure the MBKM program is implemented effectively and in harmony with evolving societal needs, national identity goals, and the broader mission of civic character development.

Introduction

The "Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom" curriculum is a policy of the Indonesian government aimed at adapting higher education curricula to the demands of the times,

particularly in the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution (Nofia, 2020). One of its primary goals is to shape citizens with religious and nationalistic characters in alignment with Pancasila values and the spirit of nationalism. This curriculum offers freedom and flexibility to students, allowing them to explore their interests, talents, and potentials. Students are granted the freedom to engage in three semesters of learning experiences outside their major, such as student exchange programs, internships, teaching assistantships, research projects, humanitarian initiatives, entrepreneurial activities, independent projects, and community development projects. However, as Viennet & Pont (2017) noted, educational policy changes can pose challenges to curriculum implementation, necessitating adjustments to align with these policy shifts. Such adjustments demand time, resources, and additional training for educators to comprehend and apply these changes in their curricula. Furthermore, changes in education policy can create uncertainty and confusion in the education environment, hindering the curriculum implementation process (Viennet & Pont, 2017; Christanti & Sukoco, 2022).

In response to the evolving demands of education policy, the *Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom* (MBKM) curriculum seeks not only to broaden students' academic exposure but also to enhance character development. One of its core objectives is to shape citizens with strong religious and nationalistic values by equipping graduates with a balanced combination of soft and hard skills. To achieve this, the curriculum promotes experiential learning programs with flexible pathways that allow students to explore their passions and develop their full potential. Through this approach, MBKM envisions preparing graduates who are not only academically competent but also ethically grounded and socially responsible—ready to contribute meaningfully to nation-building.

Discussions regarding the implementation of the "Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom" curriculum in various universities have been widespread since its inception, including in State Islamic Higher Education Institutions in Indonesia. Nofia, (2020) revealed that the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom policy provides ample opportunities to create a generation capable of meeting the demands of the times, especially in Islamic universities where its implementation is optimized. Additionally, Nita et al. (2022) highlighted the positive impact of the curriculum freedom to learn, campus freedom program on improving students' attitude, knowledge, and general and specific skills. In another discussion, Aryanti et al., (2023) found that the implementation of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom positively influenced students' learning outcomes and career readiness. However, Oksari et al. (2022) reported that despite the smooth execution of Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom, there is a lack of evaluation regarding the success of the program, with its implementation perceived as merely fulfilling the program requirements, prompting the need for an evaluation of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom.

Various studies indicate that the analysis of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom implementation in shaping citizens with religious and nationalistic characters, particularly considering religious and national aspects in education, has not been extensively explored. Nizam (2020) emphasized the significance of soft skills, specifically religion, morals, and ethics, in executing humanitarian projects as mandated by the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom initiative. Involving students on a voluntary basis is closely linked to their nationalism, as young spirited individuals with academic competence and interests can serve as "*foot soldiers*" to enhance their social awareness within the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom program (Nizam, 2020). Hence, this research aims to address the challenges of implementing this curriculum in shaping citizens with religious and nationalistic characters by understanding the impacts, obstacles, and potentials of the curriculum, contributing to a deeper understanding of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom implementation in the context of molding citizens with religious and nationalistic characters.

Method

This research utilizes a qualitative research method employing a literature review design involving several stages. Firstly, the researcher identifies relevant keywords related to the research topic, namely "implementation of the Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom curriculum" and "citizens with religious and nationalistic characters." Subsequently, the researcher collects journal articles, books, and other literature sources pertinent to the topic. The next step involves organizing and reviewing the literature as the foundational rationale for the research problem related to the implementation of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom in the context of shaping citizens with religious and nationalistic characters within a literature review design for qualitative research (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). The researcher also needs to consider the overall structure to organize these studies and develop a literature map showing the main categories of the studies, positioning the proposed study within these categories, then summarizing relevant studies, noting complete references according to specific style guidelines, and extracting information about the research problem, research questions, data collection and analysis, as well as the final results of these studies (Creswell and Creswell, 2017). This research organizes the literature review as the foundational rationale for the research problem concerning the challenges of implementing the Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom curriculum in shaping citizens with religious and nationalistic characters through a literature review design for qualitative research (Boote and Beile, 2005). The researcher also needs to consider the overall structure to organize these studies and develop a literature map used to illustrate the main categories of the studies and position the proposed study within these categories.

The qualitative research method with a literature review for the title "Challenges in Implementing the 'Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom' Curriculum to Shape Citizens with Religious and Nationalistic Characters" is illustrated in the form of a process diagram

through the stages of problem identification, research method selection, literature search, source evaluation, data analysis, interpretation of results, and report writing as follows:

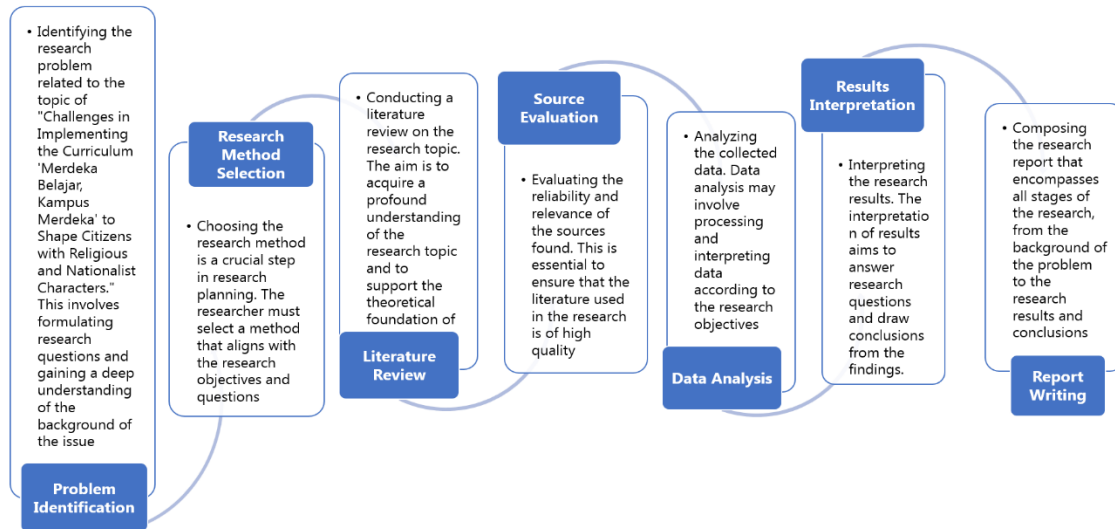


Fig. 1. Research Design

Findings and Discussion

Role of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom (MBKM) in Shaping Religious and Nationalistic Characters

The Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom can be viewed from the perspective of curriculum theory as an innovation in higher education. Curriculum theory emphasizes the importance of adaptation to the changing times and societal needs (Nofia, 2020). Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom reflects a curriculum concept responsive to contemporary demands by providing freedom and flexibility for students to explore their interests, talents, and potentials. This aligns with the progressive curriculum theory, which emphasizes the significance of direct experience and active student participation in the learning process (Darling and Nordenbo, 2003).

Furthermore, the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom also mirrors humanistic curriculum theory, emphasizing personal development and individual potential. By granting students the freedom to choose learning paths aligned with their interests and talents, the curriculum enables holistic personal development and individual empowerment (Nofia, 2020). In another curriculum theory, critical curriculum theory, the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom can be seen as an effort to provide academic freedom for students and reduce bureaucratization in higher education. This aligns with the critical curriculum concept, emphasizing individual empowerment and criticism of existing power structures (Brookfield, 2000; Ruddiman, 1993). Thus, the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom can be understood as an innovative curriculum reflecting various curriculum theories, emphasizing responsiveness to societal developments, individual

empowerment, and criticism of power structures in higher education. On the other hand, the Freedom to Learn curriculum can also be categorized as part of postmodern curriculum because it emphasizes the development of students' creativity and an education experience centered on individual interests, which are characteristic of the postmodern approach to curriculum (Piiro, 1999). Postmodern curriculum often emphasizes pluralism, inclusivity, and recognition of various perspectives and identities. In this context, the postmodern curriculum can support the formation of religious and nationalistic attitudes by appreciating diversity and promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.

The formation of religious attitudes in the postmodern curriculum may not be based on specific religious dogmas or doctrines but on universal values found in various religious traditions, such as justice, empathy, and peace (Piiro, 1999). This can help students develop a deeper understanding of their own religion and appreciate the religions of others. Meanwhile, the formation of nationalistic attitudes in the postmodern curriculum can be interpreted as the development of a non-exclusive or chauvinistic sense of nationalism that recognizes and celebrates diversity within a nation. The postmodern curriculum can encourage students to understand their national history and culture in a broader global context and appreciate the contributions of various groups and communities to national identity. However, it should be noted that the postmodern curriculum can also challenge traditional concepts of religiosity and nationalism by criticizing power structures and dominant narratives that may have marginalized marginalized voices (Giroux, 1991). Therefore, the relationship between the formation of religious and nationalistic attitudes in the postmodern curriculum may be more complex and dynamic, reflecting the diversity of approaches and interpretations in postmodern society.

The implications of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom according to postmodern curriculum theory present a challenge for educators to create situations that are responsive to social changes, moral and scientific uncertainty, and personal anxieties. Banks, (2015) suggests that the curriculum must be able to accommodate cultural, economic, and technological changes often manifesting in public areas and actual issues. In the context of postmodernity, educators need to create more flexible and responsive situations capable of accommodating changes occurring in society. This aligns with the concept of postmodernity emphasizing uncertainty, change, and complexity in society, which also influences education (Piiro, 1999).

In the context of shaping citizens with religious and nationalistic characters, the implementation of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom must also consider religious and national aspects in education (Nizam, 2020). The role of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom in shaping religious and nationalistic characters is significant. The curriculum is designed to provide freedom for students to choose courses and learning activities that suit their interests and talents, ensuring they gain relevant experiences for the needs of the time (Nofia, 2020). In the context of shaping religious

character, curriculum freedom to learn, campus freedom can facilitate students to take courses or participate in activities that deepen their understanding of religious values and ethics (Nizam, 2020; Hidayatullah, 2021). This may include interdisciplinary studies integrating science and religious values, as well as activities promoting social service and community development in humanitarian projects.

These humanitarian projects will shape social sensitivity and nationalistic character, contributing to national development, such as building villages in thematic real work lectures or other humanitarian activities as voluntary forms of student engagement with society and the nation. The curriculum freedom to learn, campus freedom program also supports student exchanges and internships that can broaden students' perspectives on cultural and social diversity in Indonesia, strengthening their love for the homeland and national pride (Nizam, 2020; Siregar et al., 2020). The Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom also aims to prepare graduates as future leaders of the nation, developing relevant soft and hard skills (Susilawati, 2021). Through a flexible experiential learning approach, students are expected to develop their potential and become responsible individuals with ethics and a commitment to the well-being of society and the nation to shape citizens with religious and nationalistic characters.

The formation of citizens with religious and nationalistic characters within the scope of PTKIN, in addition to the implementation of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom, is also supported by the Ministry of Religion's flagship program, namely religious moderation. This program strengthens soft skills for students in PTKIN. Religious moderation, essentially known as *wasathiyah*, is a teaching of all religions that, in essence, is an attitude and perspective full of wisdom in balance and justice. PTKIN aligns the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom with the religious moderation program as an effort to shape students with religious and nationalistic characters. Students are equipped with the understanding that being religious should not be extreme, but in religion, they should seek a common ground to shape characters of wisdom, purity, and courage (Hefni, 2020).

Challenges in Integrating Religious and National Values in the Implementation of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom

Challenges in implementing the **Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom** encompass several aspects. Firstly, there is a challenge in integrating experiential learning programs into existing curricula and ensuring that these programs are accessible to all students without compromising the quality of education (Nofia, 2020). Secondly, there is a challenge in ensuring that the curriculum can accommodate cultural, economic, and technological changes that often manifest in public areas and current issues (Kristiawan, 2019). Additionally, there is a challenge in ensuring that the curriculum can create a learning environment responsive to these changes, aligning with the concept of postmodernity that emphasizes uncertainty, change, and complexity in society (Kristiawan, 2019).

According to Kristiawan (2019), another challenge lies in integrating religious and national values into the curriculum and ensuring that the curriculum freedom to learn, campus freedom program can shape citizens with strong religious and nationalistic characters. Moreover, there is a challenge in ensuring that the program provides opportunities for students to develop their religious and nationalistic characters through diverse and flexible learning experiences, aiming to produce graduates with competencies and characters aligned with the demands of the times and the nation (Nofia, 2020). Another challenge, as noted by Nofia (2020) is to ensure that the implementation of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom can have a significant positive impact on the formation of religious and nationalistic characters of students, meeting the expectations of the government and society for this program.

From several challenges identified in previous research, it is known that the challenges in implementing a new curriculum lie in the shift of thinking and processing paradigms where there is a change in the learning process from a conventional model to one that is more responsive to societal needs and developments. This poses a unique difficulty for technologically challenged educators and those confined to conventional teaching patterns. Additionally, the challenge of ensuring that the new curriculum can accommodate changes in culture, economy, and technology frequently arises in society (Kristiawan, 2019). Changes in the curriculum, especially in the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom, are expected to provide opportunities for students to fully develop their potential, encompassing both soft and hard skills, in line with the demands of the times and societal needs. Another challenge is to ensure that the implementation of the Curriculum Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom can have a significant positive impact on the implementation process in higher education, thus meeting the expectations of the government, society, and industries for the achievement of the curriculum's goals. Therefore, it is crucial that the implementation of the curriculum is integrated with the effort to instill religious and national values in students as part of their soft skill competencies.

However, integrating religious and national values into the curriculum also poses several challenges. One of them is ensuring inclusivity and respect for diverse religious and cultural perspectives. This requires careful consideration not to favor one religious or national identity over another and to promote understanding and tolerance (Sopiansyah and Masrurroh, 2021). Another challenge is finding a balance between religious and national values without imposing them. The curriculum must provide opportunities for students to explore and understand these values while respecting individual beliefs and identities. It is essential to create a learning environment that encourages critical thinking and open dialogue about religious and national issues (Kristiawan, 2019). Another challenge lies in developing a curriculum that reflects the dynamic and evolving nature of religious and national identities. This requires continuous review and adaptation of the curriculum to address changes in societal values, beliefs, and practices, as well as to integrate diverse perspectives and experiences. Moreover, it needs to be ensured that the integration of religious and

national values in the curriculum complies with educational standards and regulations. Navigating legal and ethical considerations related to achieving religious understanding and nationalistic character is crucial, ensuring that the curriculum adheres to principles that uphold pluralism in education (Kristiawan, 2019). Overall, integrating religious and national values into the curriculum requires a wise and balanced approach that respects diversity, encourages critical thinking, and adapts to the ever-changing nature of societal values and beliefs.

Conclusion

The implementation of the *Freedom to Learn, Campus Freedom* (MBKM) curriculum in higher education offers opportunities to shape students with religious and nationalistic characters through flexible, experiential, and interdisciplinary learning pathways. While the curriculum provides freedom for students to explore their interests beyond disciplinary boundaries, its success requires careful integration of religious and national values, alignment with educational standards, and sensitivity to pluralism. This study highlights the importance of continuous curriculum review, ethical implementation, and synergy with programs such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs' Religious Moderation initiative in PTKIN. A balanced and inclusive approach is essential to ensure that MBKM not only produces graduates with relevant competencies but also fosters civic character and social responsibility in alignment with the values of Pancasila and the dynamics of contemporary society.

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