



## Obstacles and Strategies for Implementing the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Curriculum at Theological College X

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### Article Info

#### Article history:

Received November 28, 2025

Approved December 20, 2025

#### Keywords:

Merdeka Belajar, Kampus Merdeka (MBKM), KKNi, Theological College (STT)

#### ABSTRACT

*Education in Indonesia is continuously evolving through curriculum development based on the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNi). One of the latest initiatives is the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM), introduced in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and centred on the concept of Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning). However, implementing the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Curriculum in Theological Colleges (Sekolah Tinggi Teologi) faces several challenges, including a limited understanding of educational regulations, inadequate human resources, and insufficient funding. This study employs a qualitative, phenomenological approach to analyse the barriers faced by Sekolah Tinggi Teologi X in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program. The results indicate that several aspects of MBKM are implementable, including: Lectures outside the primary study program, field service practice (PPL), an assessment system that does not require mandatory mid-semester or final exams. Conversely, other components remain difficult to execute, such as student exchange programs, entrepreneurship initiatives, and independent studies or projects. This study recommends that stakeholders analyse self-training strategies, evaluate the current curriculum, and develop a partnership strategy to accelerate the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Theological Colleges.*

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**How to cite:** Senjaya, R. C., Sihotang, H., & Kailola, L. G. (2026). Obstacles and Strategies for Implementing the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Curriculum at Theological College X. *Jurnal Ilmiah Global Education*, 7(1), 140–152. <https://doi.org/10.55681/jige.v7i1.4956>

### INTRODUCTION

Education plays a very large role in the development of individuals and society as well as the development of a nation. The education system in Indonesia often undergoes curriculum improvements and refinements in accordance with what is planned and created by the central government to be implemented at every level of education so that it can coexist with the development of the times and the needs of the community. The curriculum is a tool designed to help educators and students understand the problems they face every day. The curriculum is designed to achieve goals, and the success of the curriculum depends on the ability of educators, those who are responsible for implementing the curriculum that has been created by the state. Curriculum management at all levels of education will certainly be affected by the way

government policies are implemented in the field of education. Every higher education institution must modify and adapt the applicable curriculum so that the implementation process can be adjusted to curriculum change policies.

The Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) is the basis for the planning and development of this country's education curriculum. In addition to producing graduates who have the knowledge and skills needed in the world of work, the KKNI also serves as a reference for educational institutions in developing curricula that are relevant to the demands of society.

In Indonesia, the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka is a form of emergency curriculum in education developed in response to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. This new curriculum introduces the idea of Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning), which emphasizes fully student-centered learning. According to Hidayat (2024), the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) or Independent Learning Independent Campus policy is a combination of the principles of the Bologna Process and the liberal education curriculum implemented in the United States. His research findings indicate that MBKM is an important step in providing relevant and responsive higher education. The incorporation of Indonesia's educational transformation concept with these two paradigms in the MBKM policy provides a strong foundation for inclusive learning, which aims to prepare students with critical skills, adaptability, and social responsibility.

The MBKM curriculum is expected to encourage students to master a variety of knowledge that is useful for entering the world of work or the Society 5.0 industry. This curriculum concept is highly relevant today because the advancement of science and technology can help society solve problems and meet community needs (Kholik et al., 2022). In the MBKM curriculum, every student has the opportunity to pursue interdisciplinary studies both within and outside of their university and study program. According to the MBKM higher education curriculum rules, students must also complete 20 credits (SKS) outside of their study program and a maximum of 40 credits (SKS) for learning and practical activities off-campus. In addition to academic success, students are also expected to have marketable skills (Hasim, 2020).

Furthermore, the MBKM curriculum is expected to be implemented with an Outcome Based Education (OBE) learning system to address the challenges of technological advancement, allowing graduates to focus more on achieving learning outcomes relevant to their field of study (Sopiansyah et al., 2022). However, in general, Theological Colleges (Sekolah Tinggi Teologi) consistently lag in implementing educational regulations (especially the curriculum) when compared to general higher education institutions (universities and others). There are challenges faced in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum at Theological College X.

Essentially, the main idea behind merdeka belajar (independent learning) is to create a learning environment that is comfortable and free from the pressure of meeting predetermined academic standards (Cholilah et al., 2020). Therefore, to be proactive, it is crucial to conduct an analysis before the institution implements a new curriculum. By taking this action, the institution will gain a deeper understanding of the Merdeka Curriculum, from planning and implementation to learning assessment. This will greatly assist educational institutions in accelerating the creation of a Merdeka Curriculum that is compliant with the KKNI (Indonesian National Qualifications Framework).

## METHODS

The research method used is a qualitative phenomenological approach. The qualitative phenomenological approach aims to describe the general meaning a group of individuals gives to their various life experiences related to a particular phenomenon (Purwadi et al., 2021). In this study, phenomenology aims to describe the perceptions of stakeholders at Theological College X regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) Curriculum and the obstacles encountered.

Data collection was carried out through interviews with all ten stakeholders of Theological College X, consisting of: 1 Chairman (KA) and 1 Vice-Chairman (WKA) of the Theological College, 2 lecturers (Ds 1, Ds 2), students (M1, M2), alumni (A1, A2), and two representatives from the foundation (Y1 and Y2). This was done to gain an understanding of the obstacles faced by Theological College X in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). Data analysis was performed by reducing the data obtained through the interviews to solve the problem and maintain consistency with the research objectives.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Indonesian National Qualification Framework (KKNI)

The Indonesian National Qualification Framework (Kerangka Kualifikasi Nasional Indonesia or KKNI) is a framework that governs the leveling of competency qualifications, in accordance with Presidential Regulation No. 8 of 2012. To provide recognition for work competency that aligns with the employment structure in various sectors, the KKNI functions to standardize, equate, and integrate education, job training, and work experience. In connection with the national education system, national job training programs, and the assessment of learning outcome equivalence, the KKNI reflects the quality and identity of the Indonesian nation. The goal is to produce productive and high-quality Indonesian human resources.

Based on interviews, the Chairman (KA) and Vice-Chairman (WKA) stated that the KKNI is more suited for implementation in General Higher Education Institutions but is less relevant for Theological Colleges. This is attributed to the segmented nature of the workplace or service (churches, schools, and Christian foundations) after graduation. Theological College X began implementing the KKNI in 2019 using learning tools such as the Semester Learning Plan (RPS) and the Semester Learning Activity Plan (RKPS), as mandated by Presidential Regulation No. 8 of 2012. The qualification level of skills is determined based on the expected graduate profile. Meanwhile Lecturer (DS1) revealed that the learning tools are essentially the same as those in the previous curriculum, just with a name change, and they experienced no difficulty in implementation. However, DS2 expressed a different view, reporting difficulty in creating the learning tools due to a lack of understanding of the preparation methods. Consequently, DS2 felt a need for training and mentoring.

According to Students (M1 and M2), the change in their learning pattern with the KKNI is better than the previous curriculum. This is because of the encouragement to possess skills relevant to their field of study. Alumnus (A1) stated that the skills acquired during the lectures help them in their work as a Christian religious educator. Meanwhile, Alumnus (A2) felt that the skills they gained were very helpful in ministry at the church and in schools.

Stages of Curriculum Design Based on KKN, the curriculum design stages based on the KKNI consist of 10 steps (Fatirul & Walujo 2022) (Cholilah et al. 2023), as follows: 1) determining the expected learning outcomes for course graduates, 2) conducting a learning

analysis to generally describe the learning materials, 3) analyzing learning needs to ascertain the required extent of materials and learning tools, 4) establishing learning indicators to measure the achievement of sub-course learning outcomes, which serve as the goals of each learning process, 5) determining evaluation standards and developing evaluation tools according to pre-determined success metrics, 6) selecting and creating learning strategies, activities, and assignments for students, 7) developing resources and learning materials that integrate relevant teaching elements, 8) compiling and creating formative assessments, 9) implementing improvement (Tinjauan Kurikulum/Curriculum Review), 10) compiling and developing summative assessments to ensure the achievement of student outcomes.

### **Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka**

According to (Ayudia et al., 2023), there are two essential concepts of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM): 1) Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning), this refers to recognizing the freedom in thinking and the effort to increase understanding of a certain field of knowledge. 2) Kampus Merdeka (Independent Campus), this is a continuous process as an effort to break free from mental constraints (Fuadi, 2022:183).

The Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) is an initiative from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) introduced to replace the 2013 Curriculum. The Merdeka Curriculum in higher education aims to meet students' learning interests, both in their current field of study and in areas outside their major or study program. This is supported by providing opportunities to study beyond the number of credits (SKS) set by each university. The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) launched this program to help students master various fields of knowledge to be ready to enter the workforce. Starting in early 2020, the program gives students the opportunity to choose courses according to their interests. Students may choose to take courses outside their study program at the same university, take courses from the same study program at a different university, select courses from a different study program at another university or participate in learning activities outside of the university setting.

During the interview with the Chairman (KA), it was revealed that the Covid-19 pandemic occurred one year after the implementation of the KKNI at Theological College X. The learning method shifted from face-to-face to online, while still adhering to the principles of the KKNI. Both KA and the Vice-Chairman (WKA) stated that students continued to reside in the dormitory due to PSPB (Large-Scale Social Restrictions) and PPKM (Restrictions on Community Activities), while lecturers conducted lessons via online platforms. KA emphasized that the need for internet connection and computer devices increased as a medium for learning. WKA added that since the KKNI was only adopted in 2019, the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum is still in the analysis and development stage.

On the other hand, the lecturers (D1 and D2) stated that the skill of using technology became important and they were compelled to adapt to online learning media. The challenges they faced included preparing interesting and creative teaching materials using platforms like YouTube, Zoom, and Google Meet. Furthermore, interaction with students was also felt to be reduced. After the pandemic ended, learning returned to face-to-face sessions with increased mastery of technology for both lecturers and students.

The Foundation (Y1) agreed with KA, WKA, and D1 and D2 that the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) is still in the analysis and development stage after the Covid-19 pandemic. The Foundation (Y2) stated that funding for facilities and infrastructure, such as computers, internet quotas, medical supplies, and masks, became a priority during the pandemic, which served as a new experience and improved digital literacy for all parties.

According to the Students (M1) and (M2), they felt they did not fully understand the Merdeka Curriculum due to a lack of socialization regarding MBKM. Echoing this, the Alumni (A1) and (A2) also stated that they had not fully grasped the context of MBKM, despite having participated in MBKM programs such as internships and weekend practices in churches.

There are nine forms of learning activities organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) within the scope of the MBKM program: 1) Student Exchange, 2) Internship/Practical Work, 3) Teaching Assistantship in Educational Units, 4) Research, 5) Humanitarian Project, 6) Entrepreneurship Activities, 7) Independent Study Project, 8) Building a Village / Thematic Community Service Program (KKN), 9) National Defense (Bela Negara).

The stages of MBKM implementation require higher education institutions to establish MBKM governance that covers: a) Preparation of MBKM Implementation Governance Completeness; this involves the institution's policies, the reorientation of study program curricula, the implementation guide, the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for MBKM, and the MBKM learning activity plan, b) Student Registration and Selection; the higher education institution follows the registration and selection procedures established either by the organizer or by the study program, c) Assignment of Supervising Lecturers, a supervising lecturer is assigned to mentor students during the learning activities. The mechanism for assignment and the requirements are determined by the policy of each higher education institution, d) Execution of MBKM Activities: This execution is categorized into activities initiated by Kemendikbudristek and independent MBKM activities organized by the higher education institution in collaboration with partners. E\_ Partnership/Partners: Partners can be either educational or non-educational institutions. F) Assessment and Evaluation of MBKM Results: Assessment is conducted to enhance the quality, performance, and productivity of MBKM implementation. The evaluation focuses on individual students as well as the MBKM organizers.

### **Overview of Theological Colleges (Sekolah Tinggi Teologi) in Indonesia**

Theological College (Sekolah Tinggi Teologi) is a higher education institution that studies the science of theology, with a specific focus on Christian religious theories generally found only in Indonesia. Broadly, theology is the rational study and analysis of theories from various religions, with the goal of simplifying and conveying those concepts in language that is easier to understand.

The concepts of Merdeka Belajar and Kampus Merdeka also need to be implemented within the scope of Theological Colleges, as theology students are expected to be skilled and proficient in keeping up with the times.

Theological Colleges are the front guard in producing graduates who possess skills and competitiveness in developing the curriculum initiated by the current government, which is also influenced by the dynamics of technological change (Sastra et al., 2019). All higher education institutions, particularly Theological Colleges, must immediately adapt to the highly digital world

due to the rapid development of technology. Theological Colleges must also keep pace with the constantly changing higher education curriculum. Examples of curriculum modifications resulting from technological development include the Merdeka Campus Learning (Pembelajaran Kampus Merdeka) and the KKNI (National Qualification Framework), which position higher education institutions as the front line in producing graduates who are competent and competitive in the curriculum currently being implemented by the government (Tuju et al., 2022). In line with the opinion of (Hendri et al., 2023), Theological Colleges need to build the concept of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka on campus, thereby establishing a process for preparing students to face the existing challenges, both in terms of employment and ministry in their surrounding environment.

Based on the interviews with the Chairman (KA) of Theological College X and the Foundation (Y1), the general characteristics of Theological Colleges in Central Java are as follows:

a) Management

Management still adopts a family relationship pattern, which can create several challenges. Transparency and accountability in institutional management may be compromised due to a tendency to prioritize personal relationships over objectivity in academic evaluation and development.

b) Funding

Funding for Theological Colleges comes from the foundation, sponsors, and donors. Sponsors involve a mutually beneficial relationship for both parties. Funds from donors are contributions aimed at improving the quality of education. Reliance on these funding sources can become an issue if the support received is inconsistent or limited.

c) Implementation of Learning

Learning in Theological Colleges still uses a block system (sistem paket) of courses per semester, where subjects are determined by a fixed curriculum without flexibility for students. This differs from the desired approach, which should allow students to choose courses according to their interests and academic needs. Through freedom in both academic and non-academic learning, the MBKM curriculum should be able to provide meaningful learning experiences for students. Therefore, all higher education stakeholders—leadership, lecturers, students, alumni, and users—must be fully involved in curriculum development (Suwandi, 2020).

d) Resources (Lecturers)

Some lecturers at Theological Colleges still possess limited knowledge of applicable educational regulations. This can affect their understanding and implementation of education policies in accordance with established standards. Consequently, the implementation of academic programs and educational administration may be suboptimal.

e) Graduates

Graduates of Theological Colleges are generally prepared to provide spiritual service in various church and community settings. They are trained to become spiritual leaders who can teach religious doctrine and accompany the congregation on their spiritual journeys.

### **Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Curriculum Activities Applicable in Theological Colleges**

The implementation of the MBKM policy does not proceed without obstacles, which are faced by both the educational organizers (Foundation) and the executors, namely the lecturers, students, institutional partners in the business and industrial world, and the government. A curriculum implementation plan must contain MBKM policies and should discuss planning, the learning process, monitoring, and evaluation to address existing problems (Baharuddin, 2021). According to (Bhakti et al, 2022), several challenges occur during the implementation of these programs:

- i. Student Exchange: Student exchange is conducted with partner universities, both domestic and foreign, using offline and online learning methods. The goal is to expand the students' network and enhance their knowledge and academic culture at each university. The challenge in implementing this program is the unstable technology network in some regions, which prevents the learning process from meeting expectations.
- ii. Internship/Practical Work: The goal of this internship program is for students to apply the theory acquired on campus to field practice. Through the internship, students gain skills and experience in the business world that align with current scientific and technological developments. Challenges in implementing this program include low lecturer involvement, lack of program socialization, difficulty matching the recognition of the correct credit (SKS) count to the appropriate course, low student understanding of the program, and the available internships not matching student interests.
- iii. Teaching Assistantship in Educational Units (Kampus Mengajar): This activity is carried out through the "Kampus Mengajar" (Teaching Campus) program. This program helps students conduct teaching activities according to their interests and talents and supports the equalization of education in Indonesia. However, implementation challenges include the high number of applicants, leading to placements in primary education levels that do not align with the graduate profile, student domicile issues, and the non-execution of established main duties and functions.
- iv. Research: This research aims for students to possess "Critical Thinking" skills and enhance their ability to conduct high-quality research.
- v. Humanitarian Project: Humanitarian projects are developed based on Indonesia's geographical conditions, which are prone to disasters. These activities aim for active student participation in disaster management processes (during and after a disaster), fostering empathy and social spirit to get involved in humanitarian projects. The main challenge is the sustainability of the humanitarian project implementation.
- vi. Entrepreneurship Activities: Entrepreneurship activities are a means to explore students' potential and interest in starting a business, particularly given the relatively high interest in entrepreneurship among the millennial generation.
- vii. Independent Study/Project: This independent study activity serves as a platform for off-campus learning aimed at developing innovative and creative ideas or products based on student ideas.
- viii. Building a Village/Thematic Community Service Program (KKN): One form of this project activity is the Thematic Community Service Program (KKNT). Through KKNT, students are expected to have real, direct experience in the field to implement the knowledge they have learned. The challenges frequently encountered are the adjustment process, village funding issues, and logistics and accommodation problems for participating students.

- ix. National Defense (Bela Negara): This program encourages students to be active in increasing nationalism and care for the Indonesian nation, as well as building responsible behavior and skills as Indonesian human resources

Higher education institutions must prepare resources to ensure the MBKM curriculum is implemented as efficiently as possible because there are obstacles that need to be overcome. Achieving broader collaboration is a primary constraint in carrying out MBKM activities. Additional factors creating difficulties include the adaptation of academic information systems, curriculum modification, technical limitations faced by lecturers in scheduling online and offline teaching activities, financial support, and parental support. Furthermore, the utilization of technology like social media is also important for disseminating knowledge about MBKM activities so students can understand them (Widianti et al., 2024).

However, based on interviews with the leaders, lecturers, alumni, and students of Theological College X, only a few MBKM activities can currently be carried out:

1. Taking Courses Outside the Theological College's Study Program

Taking courses outside the Theological College's study program is permitted for students who have reached the fifth semester or higher. Students are given the opportunity to take courses from other study programs relevant to their interests and academic needs. This aims to broaden the students' perspective and skills beyond their field of theology.

Based on interviews with KA (Chairman) and WKA (Vice-Chairman), implementation is currently still in the analysis stage because the number of students in one study program is too small compared to the other. Theological College X currently has only two study programs.

D1 (Lecturer) said that taking courses in other study programs provides additional knowledge for students, but the technical implementation of the program is still unclear. D2 (Lecturer) believes that MBKM socialization must be conducted so that the entire academic community understands and participates in implementing the program.

M1 and M2 (Students) stated that they need guidance from lecturers to decide on courses relevant to their interests.

2. Field Ministry Practice – Praktek Pelayanan Lapangan (PPL)

Field Ministry Practice (PPL), or an internship at an educational institution or church, is typically carried out for one semester. This program aims to give students direct experience in performing spiritual service and applying the knowledge they have learned. Through PPL, students can develop practical skills in managing religious activities and building relationships with the church community and educational institutions. PPL also involves teaching assistantship in educational units, which effectively enhances students' communication skills, creativity, and collaboration.

In the interview with KA, PPL is similar to the practical work or internship program in MBKM, but its credit weight is 6 SKS, which is different from the MBKM internship program's weight of 12 SKS. If the same number of credits were implemented, the existing courses would need to be adjusted.

WKA revealed that PPL generally assists the partner where students intern. This is evident from the sustainability of the program through cooperation (MOU) between Theological College X and its partners (Schools).



Y1 and Y2 (Foundation) agree with WKA, as churches and foundations have served as sites for PPL in recent years. Evaluation results from Y1 and Y2 show that they are quite satisfied with the PPL results of these students, as it provides a positive impact within the church and the foundation.

In the interview with D1, the lecturer acts as the student's PPL supervisor, providing structured guidance and mentoring. A similar approach is taken by D2.

M1 (Student) expressed that the learning material they received was easier to understand with the implementation of PPL. M2 (Student) said that their self-confidence and communication skills increased after participating in PPL, which also helps with the preparation of their final thesis. Alumni (A1 and A2) explained that the PPL experience helps them in their current jobs. With the existing network, they can easily join work, ministry, and education communities.

### 3. Assessment System

The student assessment system at the Theological College does not always mandate mid-term exams (UTS) or final exams (UAS). This assessment aims to measure students' understanding more holistically and flexibly.

Based on interviews with KA and WKA, after implementing task-based assessment, there was feedback from students requesting that lecturers consider the number of assignments given.

Students (M1 and M2) expressed that the limited time to complete assignments was due to non-academic duties like gardening and cleaning classrooms and the environment, which consumed their time.

Lecturers (D1) and (D2) stated that the assessment system helps achieve the graduate profile of Theological College X. In practice, the RPS (Semester Learning Plan) and RPKS (Semester Learning Activity Plan) are adjusted to the study program's learning outcomes and the course's learning outcomes. The challenge faced is the lack of student commitment in completing tasks, which is why D1 and D2 provide time management guidance to students to foster a "growth mindset."

### **Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Activities Difficult to Implement in Theological Colleges**

Although some MBKM curriculum activities can be implemented at Theological Colleges, the following programs are generally difficult to execute :

#### a. Student Exchange

Student exchange programs between Theological Colleges are often constrained by high financing factors. Costs related to this program, such as transportation, accommodation, and consumption, become an additional burden.

Furthermore, based on interviews with KA (Chairman) and WKA (Vice-Chairman), the curriculum in many Theological Colleges is generally similar, so the exchange does not always provide significant added benefit. Each Theological College also has a distinctive theological and dogmatic approach, which can limit the flexibility of exchange between institutions. Moreover, the difference in accreditation systems between Theological Colleges can complicate the recognition of credits and courses taken during the exchange. Not all infrastructure and resources of the Theological Colleges support this exchange program, requiring inter-institutional communication for collaboration.

Lecturer (D1) stated that because there is no clear regulation regarding SKS (credit) conversion for student exchange, this program needs to undergo a SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats). Lecturer (D2) echoed this, citing the differences in university culture and the funds needed for the program.

Students (M1) and (M2) suggested the need for socialization for this program and guidance from lecturers for its implementation.

Foundation (Y1) and Y2 emphasized that Theological College X needs to develop a curriculum that aligns with national education policy. Therefore, a curriculum analysis that impacts graduates must be carried out to meet job needs in the fields of education and spiritual ministry.

b. Entrepreneurship Activities

Merdeka Wirausaha (Independent Entrepreneurship) is a program designed to develop students into prospective entrepreneurs through activities outside the classroom. In interviews with KA and WKA, it was explained that this entrepreneurship activity is difficult to implement at Theological College X because graduates are fundamentally prepared for spiritual service/ministry. The learning schedule is very dense, making time for entrepreneurship extremely limited. Other factors include: a lack of sufficient knowledge or skills for entrepreneurship, limited capital (personally or from financial institutions/foundations), and limited resources such as business space, tools, technology, and product or service marketing strategies.

Lecturers (D1) and (D2) shared a similar opinion, stating that entrepreneurship is still in the planning stages due to limitations in human resources, infrastructure, and funding.

According to input from Students (M1 and M2): The program has not been implemented due to time constraints caused by independent study activities, gardening, cleaning duty, spiritual activities, and weekend ministry.

c. Independent Study/Project

The constraints experienced by students in conducting independent study or projects include time management. Students find it difficult to balance their time between study, independent projects, and other activities like gardening and dormitory life. They also experience limited access to books, journals, low digital literacy, and other resources that support project completion. These reasons were stated by KA, WKA, and lecturers (D1 and D2). In interviews with the Foundation, the main issue faced is funding for this program. The Foundation has been trying to find donors or sponsors for the program.

Students (M1 and M2) stated that due to limited time and guidance from lecturers, this program has not been implemented

### **Strategies for Implementing the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Curriculum**

The implementation of the MBKM curriculum can be carried out independently through the following strategies: (1) Independent Learning through Portal: The Foundation Leadership and lecturers utilize the Merdeka Belajar portal for self-study. (2) Webinar Participation: The Foundation Leadership and lecturers can further their knowledge about the Merdeka Curriculum through webinars. (3) Learning Communities: Learning communities provide information about the Merdeka Curriculum to the Foundation Leadership and lecturers. (4) Expert Consultation: The Foundation Leadership and lecturers can gain knowledge about best practices through suggested resource persons. (5) Help Desk Utilization: The Foundation Leadership and lecturers

can obtain further information by utilizing the help service bureau. (6) Collaborative Implementation: The execution of the Merdeka Curriculum involves collaboration between partners, lecturers, and the Foundation Leadership.

In other words, all stakeholders need to equip themselves with the capacity to develop the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka curriculum by establishing cooperation with government and private partners (educational institutions, Theological College communities, and companies) in empowering human resources, funding, and infrastructure.

Curriculum development must begin with a curriculum evaluation that considers the study program's vision, mission, goals, and objectives (VMTS), study findings, advancements in science and technology, and the Industrial Revolution 4.0. According to research (Jufriadi et al., 2022), the MBKM Curriculum for the Study Program should be developed with an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach. The Dean, Head of the Study Program, Study Program Secretary, all lecturers, alumni, and other stakeholders are invited to participate in brainstorming sessions related to curriculum evaluation and the development of the MBKM Curriculum, among other activities performed. Furthermore, the curriculum document is compiled through a workshop. The document encompasses the graduate profile, learning outcomes (detailed in knowledge, attitudes, main competencies, and specific competencies), teaching materials, assessment of competency elements, estimation and determination of study load (SKS/credits), course selection, and the arrangement of the curriculum structure.

Another strategy that needs to be focused on is flexible curriculum regulations, administrative rules, and guidelines in curriculum design as a result of the policies that must be implemented by Indonesian theological schools. This facilitates both national and international study programs. Regulations concerning budgeting, partnership, and follow-up cooperation, as well as rules regarding cooperation within and between study programs and campuses, become essential. Additionally, there needs to be a cooperation agreement between the business world and the job market, as well as international cooperation (Sopiansyah et al., 2022).

Furthermore, according to research (Soebroto, M.I, Murniarti E. 2024), to circumvent the problem of limited funding, Theological Colleges need to establish cooperation and partnerships with institutions or companies that run Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs in the field of education.

## CONCLUSION

Education in Indonesia, particularly in Theological Colleges (Sekolah Tinggi Teologi), continues to undergo adjustments in response to contemporary developments, one of which is the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka). The Merdeka Curriculum offers students the freedom to study more flexibly, aligning with their interests and academic needs, while also preparing them to enter the workforce.

However, the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Theological Colleges faces several challenges, especially related to the limited feasibility of some programs, such as student exchange and independent entrepreneurship, which are difficult to implement given the primary focus of Theological Colleges on spiritual service/ministry.

Furthermore, Theological Colleges are also confronted with challenges in human resource management and funding. Nevertheless, some activities can be implemented, such as taking courses outside the study program, Field Ministry Practice (PPL), and a flexible assessment system. To address these challenges, Theological Colleges need to adopt independent

curriculum strategies, such as utilizing learning platforms, attending webinars, and collaborating with partners in implementing a curriculum that is more appropriate for the needs of the institution and the community.

Thus, despite the challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum, Theological Colleges still have the potential to make curriculum adjustments and developments that align with student needs and the evolving landscape of higher education in Indonesia.

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