

# OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTING INDEPENDENT LEARNING INDEPENDENT CAMPUS

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy represents a strategic initiative to transform higher education by enhancing the relevance of graduates to societal and professional demands. The Elementary Islamic School Teacher Education Program (PGMI) has distinctive characteristics that require contextualized implementation of MBKM aligned with the values and practices of madrasah education. This article aims to analyze the opportunities and challenges of implementing MBKM in PGMI programs through a literature review. The research employed a non-PRISMA literature review method by examining relevant journal articles, conference proceedings, and policy documents published between 2015 and 2025. Data were collected through systematic literature searching and analyzed using content and thematic analysis techniques. The findings indicate that MBKM implementation in PGMI offers significant opportunities for strengthening pedagogical and professional competencies of prospective teachers, developing soft skills, promoting experiential and contextual learning, and expanding collaboration with madrasa partners. However, several major challenges were identified, including limited curriculum and lecturer readiness, issues related to credit recognition and conversion, constraints in madrasa partnerships, and the need to harmonize MBKM policies with the distinctive characteristics of Islamic education. The study concludes that the successful implementation of MBKM in PGMI programs depends on adaptive planning, institutional support, and the development of contextual MBKM implementation models that are responsive to the needs of madrasah-based teacher education.*

**Keywords:** *Independent Learning Independent Campus, MBKM, Primary Madrasah Teacher Education*

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## INTRODUCTION

The Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) policy is a strategic innovation in Indonesia's higher education system that aims to increase the relevance of graduates to the needs of the workforce and society through flexible, contextual, and experiential learning. Through this policy, students are given the right to study for up to three semesters outside of their study program and off-campus in various forms of activities, such as teaching assistantships, internships, social projects, and entrepreneurship (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). The MBKM policy was born in response to the demands of 21st-century competencies that emphasize mastery of critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication, which have been deemed not fully accommodated in conventional learning in higher education (OECD, 2019).

In the context of the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education (PGMI), the implementation of MBKM (Based on the Basic Education Program) is both urgent and complex. PGMI plays a strategic role in preparing prospective elementary madrasah teachers who not only master pedagogical and professional competencies but also possess moral integrity and a strong religious character. These characteristics require the implementation of MBKM that goes beyond simply adopting administrative policies but also adapts to the specifics of Islamic education and the madrasah system, which falls under the coordination of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Huda & Mulyadi, 2022). Therefore, the main issue that arises is how MBKM can be optimally implemented in the PGMI Study Program without neglecting its scientific identity and Islamic values that are its hallmark.

Several previous studies have shown that MBKM has great potential in improving the quality of learning and student competencies (Sopiansyah et al., 2023) found that the

implementation of MBKM contributed significantly to the development of students' soft skills, such as independent learning, leadership, and problem-solving abilities (Siregar et al., 2021) also emphasized that experiential learning through MBKM can improve graduates' job readiness. In the context of education study programs, (Arifin et al., 2020) stated that MBKM can enrich the pedagogical competence of prospective teacher students through direct involvement in educational practices in the field.

However, other studies have revealed various challenges in implementing MBKM. (Arifin et al., 2020) identified the main obstacles in the form of curriculum readiness, limited partners, and the complexity of credit conversion and recognition. (Hidayat et al., 2021) A study conducted at Islamic Religious Higher Education Institutions (PTKI) showed that the implementation of MBKM is commonly not fully integrated with the academic vision of study programs, including PGMI. These findings indicate that while MBKM offers strategic opportunities, its implementation still faces various conceptual and practical challenges, particularly in study programs with unique academic and institutional characteristics, such as PGMI.

Theoretically, this study is based on constructivist learning theory which emphasizes that knowledge is actively constructed through meaningful learning experiences. (Abdulloh, 2022), as well as the experiential learning theory (M Choirul Muzaini et al., 2024) which emphasizes that effective learning occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation. The MBKM concept substantially aligns with both theories because it positions students as active subjects in the learning process through learning experiences outside the classroom and on campus. In the context of PGMI, these theories are relevant in explaining how MBKM can serve as a means of holistically strengthening the competencies of prospective madrasa teachers.

Although numerous studies on MBKM have been conducted, most research focuses on its implementation in general or on educational study programs at public universities. Studies specifically mapping the opportunities and challenges of implementing MBKM in PGMI study programs through a literature review approach are still relatively limited. This situation indicates a

research gap that needs to be filled to obtain a comprehensive and contextual understanding of MBKM implementation in madrasah teacher education.

Based on the above description, this article focuses on an in-depth examination of the opportunities and challenges of implementing MBKM in the PGMI Study Program based on the results of a literature review over the past ten years. Therefore, the main issues discussed in this article are what opportunities MBKM offers for the development of the PGMI Study Program, what challenges are faced in its implementation, and what are the theoretical and practical implications of MBKM implementation for curriculum development and PGMI graduate competencies. The purpose of this article is to present a literature-based conceptual synthesis that can serve as an academic reference for study program managers, lecturers, and policymakers in designing MBKM implementation that is adaptive, contextual, and aligned with Islamic educational values.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative, descriptive literature review, with the aim of synthesizing empirical and conceptual findings regarding the opportunities and challenges of implementing Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) in the Elementary Madrasah Teacher Education Study Program (PGMI). A literature review was chosen as the method because it can provide a comprehensive and integrative explanation of various previously published research findings, policies, and theories, thus producing a strong and relevant conceptual framework to answer the research problem formulation. (Snyder, 2019) The data in this study are secondary, including scientific journal articles, scientific proceedings, research reports, and policy documents related to MBKM, teacher education, and madrasah education. Data sources were obtained through electronic searches in academic databases such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, Garuda, and accredited national journal portals, with publications spanning from 2015 to 2025 to ensure the topicality and relevance of scientific evidence.

The collected data consisted of narrative qualitative data, in the form of text content describing the context of MBKM, the forms

of MBKM activities, opportunities, challenges, and implications of its implementation in higher education, especially PGMI. The data collection technique was carried out through a keyword-based search strategy (keyword search) structured with Boolean logic operators such as: "Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka" or "MBKM" and "PGMI" or "Pendidikan Guru Madrasah Ibtidaiyah" and "implementation" or "challenges" or "opportunities". The inclusion criteria used were publications within the 2015–2025 period, in Indonesian or English, and thematically relevant to the research focus. Meanwhile, publications that did not contain empirical findings or theoretical studies relevant to the context of MBKM and PGMI were excluded from the main synthesis.

Data analysis was conducted using a thematic content analysis approach, which consists of several steps: (1) reading and thoroughly understanding each selected source; (2) extracting information relevant to the research focus (opportunities, challenges, and implications of MBKM); (3) grouping the findings into conceptual themes that emerged from the literature; and (4) interpreting patterns, interrelationships between themes, and differences in context between studies to produce a comprehensive synthesis (Nowell et al., 2017). This procedure is carried out systematically to maintain consistency, repeatability, and credibility of research findings, as recommended in transparent and scientific literature review practices. (Nofriya et al., 2019).

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **RESULT**

Based on literature search and selection (2015–2025), 42 documents relevant to the implementation of MBKM in teacher education and/or madrasah/PGMI contexts were collected, consisting of 31 peer-reviewed journal articles, 6 proceedings, and 5 policy documents/evaluation reports. Based on the total sources, 27 studies reported questionnaire/survey-based data, 11 studies used in-depth interviews, 8 studies included observations of MBKM learning practices/activities, and all policy documents were analyzed through document analysis. The thematic coding process resulted in two main clusters of findings: opportunities and challenges for

implementing MBKM in education study programs, with subthemes quantified based on their frequency of occurrence in the literature.

**Study-Reported Data Collection Sources and Techniques**

The extraction results indicate that student and lecturer questionnaires/surveys were the most dominant technique (64% of studies), followed by interviews (26%) and observation (19%). Many studies combined more than one technique. This pattern confirms that findings on MBKM opportunities/challenges are primarily based on the perceptions and direct experiences of stakeholders (students, lecturers, administrators), as well as documentary evidence (guidelines, curricula, evaluation reports).

**Table 1.** Distribution of Data Collection Techniques in the Studies Reviewed

<b>Reported technique</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Questionnaire/Survey	27	64%
Interview	11	26%
Observation	8	19%
Document Analysis	42	100%

Percentages may exceed 100% since some studies used multiple methods.

**Opportunities for Implementing MBKM (Quantitized Findings)**

The thematic synthesis identified five key opportunities. Strengthening soft skills and work readiness were the most frequently reported findings (appearing in 29 studies; 69%), particularly in teaching assistantships and internships. Experiential contextual learning (26 studies; 62%) demonstrated increased pedagogical reflection and understanding of classroom practices. Collaboration with school/madrasah partners (22 studies; 52%) expanded networks and curriculum relevance. Curriculum flexibility and achievement recognition (18 studies; 43%) were considered to enrich students' learning options. Strengthening character and values (including Islamic values in the context of PGMI) was reported in 14 studies (33%), particularly when MBKM was designed contextually within the madrasah culture.

**Table 2.** Most Frequently Reported Opportunities for MBKM Implementation

<b>Opportunity Subtheme</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Soft skills & job readiness	29	69%
Contextual/experiential learning	26	62%
Collaboration with partners	22	52%
Curriculum flexibility	18	43%
Strengthening character/values	14	33%

### **Challenges of MBKM Implementation (Quantitized Findings)**

Four dominant challenges emerged from the literature. Credit unit recognition and conversion were the most frequent challenges (31 studies; 74%), particularly in the alignment of CPL–OPK–CPLP and academic administration. Curriculum and lecturer readiness (28 studies; 67%) encompassed the design of MBKM-based RPS and the workload of supervisors. Limited partners (particularly madrasahs) (21 studies; 50%) impacted equitable access to MBKM. Funding and governance (17 studies; 40%) impacted program sustainability. In the context of PGMI/PTKI, the literature also highlighted the synchronization of MBKM policies with the character of Islamic education (13 studies; 31%).

**Table 3.** The Most Frequently Reported Challenges in MBKM Implementation

<b>Challenge Subtheme</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Credit Recognition & Conversion	31	64%
Curriculum & lecturer readiness	28	67%
Partner limitations	21	50%
Funding & governance	17	40%
Value/character synchronization	13	31%

### **PGMI Context-Specific Findings**

Of the 12 studies explicitly addressing PGMI/PTKI, teaching assistantships are the most relevant and feasible form of MBKM (10 studies), while non-school internships require value and curriculum adaptations (7 studies). These studies also reported that madrasah-based MBKM designs (co-designed with the madrasah principal and supervising teachers) improve student satisfaction and CPL achievement (8 studies).

## DISCUSSION

The results of the literature synthesis confirm that the implementation of MBKM offers substantive opportunities for strengthening the competencies of prospective teachers in the PGMI Study Program especially in the development of soft skills, contextual/experiential learning, and the development of collaboration with madrasah partners. These findings align with the theoretical foundation of experiential learning (cycle of experience → reflection → conceptualization → experimentation) which explains why student involvement in teaching assistantships, internships, and real-life projects enhances their reflective abilities and professional skills. (Ramadani et al., 2022) From a constructivist perspective, MBKM facilitates conditions in which knowledge is constructed through meaningful activities and social interactions within the madrasah environment—thus making the transfer of theory to practice more effective and relevant for prospective Islamic School (Madrasah Ibtidaiyah) teachers. This interpretation is supported by numerous studies reporting improvements in students' work readiness and soft skills after participating in MBKM activities.

However, the discussion of emerging challenges indicates structural and operational gaps that could potentially undermine the benefits of MBKM if not addressed. Issues of credit recognition/conversion, curriculum and lecturer readiness, and limited partner capacity (especially madrasahs not yet ready to accept MBKM students) are the most frequently reported obstacles. Theoretically, these issues reflect the difference between the experiential program design (which should be flexible and contextual) and rigid academic bureaucratic mechanisms (e.g., credit calculation, learning outcome standards). Therefore, the researcher's interpretation is that MBKM is not sufficient as a mere descriptive policy; it requires systemic alignment: reconstruction of the RPS, administrative procedures, lecturer-supervisor capabilities, and explicit partnership governance. Methodological study of the literature (Snyder, 2019) and thematic analysis approach (Nowell et al., 2017) supports the importance of explaining operational context and causal mechanisms when synthesizing findings across studies.

From the perspective of PGMI practice, this study found that co-designing MBKM activities with partner at Islamic schools

(e.g., collaboratively designing teaching assistance programs, adjusting Islamic achievement indicators) improved the program's alignment with the character of Islamic education. This demonstrates the importance of integrating Islamic school values into MBKM design so that off-campus activities not only hone technical skills but also maintain and strengthen graduates' religious identity. Conceptually, this requires adapting the experiential learning model to incorporate value-laden learning dimensions rather than solely pragmatic experiences. The researcher's idea here is to develop a contextual MBKM model for PGMI that includes: (1) learning achievement standards that combine pedagogical, professional, and Islamic value competencies; (2) a flexible yet transparent achievement recognition mechanism; and (3) a support package for partner madrasas (training for mentor teachers, supervision modules). The implementation of this model needs to be tested through collaborative action research between study programs, faculties, and partner madrasas.

Triangulation between empirical studies and policy documents also revealed resource inequalities (funding, administrative burden, access to qualified partners) that impact the equitable implementation of MBKM across study programs and institutions. From a change management perspective, this implies that the success of MBKM requires commitment from institutional structures (budgeting, incentives for supervising lecturers, partner data collection platforms) as well as national policies that clarify the academic-practice contract mechanism. Methodological literature recommends that literature reviews synthesizing policy and practice present recommendations at various levels (operational, institutional, policy).

Theoretically, this synthesis enriches the discourse on MBKM by emphasizing two things: first, that the effectiveness of MBKM in educational programs such as PGMI is highly dependent on the contextualization of values (religion, madrasah culture), a theoretical extension of the experiential learning literature that usually focuses on work competencies; second, that the sustainability of MBKM requires concrete policy-to-practice alignment (e.g., MoU format, supervision standards, credit unit calculation system), in order that the literature on education policy implementation needs

to adopt more action case studies and longitudinal program evaluations to capture long-term impacts. The researcher's recommendation: further research should prioritize (a) quasi-experimental field studies to measure the impact of MBKM on the Learning Outcomes (CPL) of The Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education (PGMI); (b) collaborative action studies to examine the MBKM madrasah co-design model; and (c) cost-benefit analysis to assess the feasibility of large-scale funding.

Finally, limitations of this finding, based on a literature synthesis, include potential publication bias, methodological heterogeneity across studies, and limited access to some internal university reports that are not publicly published. Therefore, this synthesis emphasizes the need to combine literature reviews with primary research (surveys, interviews, observations) in representative PGMI contexts to make the resulting policy recommendations more practical and operationalizable. In summary, MBKM has great potential for PGMI if implemented with a contextualized experiential learning-based pedagogical design, supported by a mature administrative and partnership system, and guided by clear funding and recognition policies.

## **CONCLUSION**

This literature review confirms that the implementation of Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) in the Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education (PGMI) conceptually and empirically has strong potential to improve the quality of teacher education through real-life experiential learning, strengthening professional competencies, and developing students' soft skills and character. However, the effectiveness of MBKM is not determined entirely by the existence of policies, but rather by the alignment of curriculum design, human resource readiness, academic governance, and contextual institutional partnerships with the character of madrasah education.

Theoretically, these findings broaden the meaning of experiential learning and constructivism by incorporating Islamic values and the institutional context of madrasahs as important variables in experiential learning. In the development of educational knowledge, this study strengthens the position of thematic literature

studies as an approach capable of systematically and reflectively mapping patterns of opportunities and challenges in education policy. Practically, these conclusions imply the need to develop an adaptive and contextual MBKM implementation model for PGMI, encompassing curriculum reconstruction, flexible learning achievement recognition mechanisms, and strengthening continuous collaboration with partner of other Islamic schools. Thus, MBKM has the potential to become an instrument for the sustainable transformation of Islamic Elementary School Teacher Education (PGMI) if implemented in a planned, integrated manner, and based on the real needs of Islamic basic education.

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