

Determination of Institutional and Individual Factors for the Implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka*

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ABSTRACT: *This study analyzes the multifaceted relationship between institutional and personal determinants that mold the execution of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication in particular State Islamic Universities (PTKIN) in Central Java and Yogyakarta. The analysis seeks to chart strategic priorities for implementing MBKM in the religious higher education setting. This research uses a qualitative descriptive field study approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document reviews from purposively selected informants like faculty heads, lecturers, students, and external partners. The data were evaluated using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, supported by triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to ensure validity. The study finds that successful MBKM execution is greatly influenced by strategic interunit communication, adaptive organizational structure, and incorporation into existing academic systems. Conversely, key inhibiting elements include bureaucratic rigidity, nonstandardized assessment processes, limited socialization, budgetary constraints, and weak external collaboration. These dynamics reflect the practical application of Pressman & Wildavsky's policy implementation theory, Mazmanian & Sabatier's structural framework, and Lewin's Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze model, demonstrating that effective policy adoption necessitates structural transformation and cultural adaptation. This research is exploratory and context-specific, focusing on selected PTKIN in Central Java and DI Yogyakarta. It does not include longitudinal data or viewpoints from alums and national-level stakeholders, restricting its generalizability. This study contributes to the literature by offering an in-depth policy analysis of MBKM implementation in religious higher education institutions using a combination of classic policy implementation and organizational change theories—an approach infrequently used in previous research in this domain.*

Penelitian ini ditujukan untuk menganalisis interkoneksi antara faktor kelembagaan dan faktor individu yang mempengaruhi pelaksanaan program Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) di Fakultas Dakwah dan Komunikasi di beberapa PTKIN di wilayah Jawa Tengah dan Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta. Penelitian ini bermaksud memetakan dinamika

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prioritas dalam implementasi MBKM di lingkungan pendidikan agama tinggi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan rancangan studi lapangan. Informan dipilih secara khusus dan terdiri dari pimpinan fakultas, dosen, mahasiswa, serta mitra eksternal. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi tidak berpihak, dan analisis dokumen, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman. Keabsahan data diperkuat melalui triangulasi sumber, konfirmasi informan (*member checking*), dan *peer debriefing*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan pelaksanaan MBKM sangat dipengaruhi oleh komunikasi antarunit yang strategis, struktur birokrasi yang adaptif, serta integrasi program ke dalam kurikulum dan sistem pembelajaran daring. Faktor penghambat meliputi birokrasi yang belum lentur, sistem penilaian yang belum konsisten, sosialisasi yang tidak merata, keterbatasan anggaran, serta minimnya kerja sama dengan mitra eksternal. Temuan ini mencerminkan penerapan teori Pressman & Wildavsky tentang pentingnya komunikasi kebijakan, kerangka struktur organisasi dari Mazmanian & Sabatier, dan model perubahan *Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze* dari Lewin, yang menegaskan bahwa adopsi kebijakan efektif menuntut transformasi struktural dan kultural secara simultan. Penelitian ini bersifat eksploratif dan kontekstual, terbatas pada wilayah tertentu dan belum mencakup perspektif lulusan serta pemangku kebijakan nasional, sehingga belum dapat digeneralisasi. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi baru dalam kajian implementasi kebijakan MBKM di lingkungan PTKIN dengan menggabungkan pendekatan analisis kebijakan dan teori perubahan organisasi, yang masih jarang digunakan dalam studi semacam ini.

Keywords: *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka, Policy Implementation.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

The unemployment rate of university graduates in Indonesia illustrates a significant competency gap between academic training and job demands; quantitative studies show that of the 61,345 college graduates (diploma to postgraduate) surveyed by the Central Statistics Agency through the National Labor Force Survey in 2020, 94.46% are employed, but 5.63% or around 3,457 graduates are still recorded as unemployed. Despite having a high probability of employment, 62.64% of them experienced job mismatches, with 50% experiencing over-education and 10% under-educated, which presents challenges in utilizing graduate qualifications (Setyanti et al., 2022).

Although the national unemployment rate fell to 4.91% in August 2024 compared to August 2023, college graduates posted a relatively high unemployment rate, proving severe inequality of ability (Wicaksono et al., 2023). The BPS analysis also states that vocational school graduates achieve unemployment at 9.01% and Diploma I-III graduates at 4.83%, lower than the undergraduate figures, which confirms the gap between higher education outcomes and industrial needs (Putranto et al., 2024). Regional economic factors also influence inequality, and other studies reveal the influence of industrial centers on the absorption of graduates, where areas with high industrial concentrations tend to have lower levels of inequality in job education

(Paramitasari et al., 2024). In addition, the increasingly high standards of job qualifications without being accompanied by an increase in the fundamental skills of graduates also worsens the dynamics of the labor market for new graduates (Azzahra et al., 2024).

Various studies on employment identify soft skills, hard skills, and career competencies as key competencies graduates need to compete and survive in the world of work. The soft skills referred to here are social skills, communication, self-management, and teamwork (Gelmanova & Mazhitova, 2023; Kraja et al., 2024). Hard skills are needed to maintain and develop a career (García-Álvarez et al., 2022). Meanwhile, career competencies such as knowledge about career management such as adaptability, and self-efficacy can support career progression and development in the long term (Gerçek, 2023; Grosemans & Cuyper, 2021; Lo Presti et al., 2021). On the other hand, several studies reveal several problems in employment, such as competency gaps, lack of integration of education and work environment, and competency validation. There is a difference between the competencies taught in college and the needs of the job market, resulting in graduates not being fully prepared (Babich & Ivashchenkova, 2024; Lin, 2022). In addition, the competency standards taught in universities are often irrelevant to job descriptions in the job market due to the lack of integration of education with the world of work or industry (Babich & Ivashchenkova, 2024). Meanwhile, competency validation has been carried out more indirectly, which causes skills mismatch with jobs and lack of competency guarantees for employers and this triggers problems such as covert unemployment and low productivity (García-Álvarez et al., 2022; Gelmanova & Mazhitova, 2023).

The Independent Learning Independent Campus (*Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka / MBKM*) policy was introduced to bridge the capacity gap through syllabus flexibility and meaningful field experience to address the significant competency imbalance between college graduates and the job market demands. In January 2020, the Ministry of Education and Culture introduced MBKM as one of the components of the Merdeka Learning reform, emphasizing project-based learning and a curriculum that can be adjusted to improve the work readiness of graduates (Purwanti, 2021). The implementation of MBKM, according to several studies, shows a positive response from lecturers and students because, from the MBKM program, students feel an increase in competence, both hard and soft skills, and better work readiness (Susilawati et al., 2023; Walef et al., 2023). In addition, the implementation of MBKM also encourages curriculum changes to be more flexible by adopting contextual and collaborative learning (Apriliyani et al., 2022; Hartono et al., 2022; Rozi & Sasongko, 2022). Although in terms of participation, both from the side of students and external partners (Bariyyah et al., 2023; Budiarti et al., 2022; Khairatunnimah et al., 2024), the implementation of MBKM still faces various challenges such as suboptimal information systems, lack of socialization, curriculum, and value conversion problems to limited funds (Supriati et al., 2022; Yuniati et al., 2024). Most of the research that has been conducted tends to be descriptive and discusses challenges in general. However, it has not been in-depth to analyze the complex interaction between institutional and individual factors that are the main determinants of success and obstacles to implementing MBKM.

The purpose of this study is to analyze in depth the complex and prolonged interaction between institutional factors (such as rules, resources, and leadership) and individual characteristics (including understanding, motivation, and potential resistance of

lecturers and students) that are the main determinants of success or obstacles in the implementation of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Therefore, this study seeks to identify the priorities and dynamics of each factor to map a more targeted and sustainable implementation strategy, especially in the special context of the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication in the Central Java and Yogyakarta regions.

II. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method that aims to describe in depth the phenomenon of the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* policy in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication in several State Islamic Religious Universities (*Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri / PTKIN*) in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta. The descriptive qualitative approach allows the researcher to explore the views and experiences of the resource persons without the researcher's intervention (Creswell, 2015). This approach is used to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of MBKM in the academic environment, especially in faculties that focus on the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication. The researcher will focus on describing the processes, perceptions, and practices that occur in the field to identify the factors that affect the success and obstacles of MBKM implementation.

The population in this study is all academic members in the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication at five PTKIN located in Central Java and the Special Region of Yogyakarta, namely UIN Walisongo Semarang, UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, UIN Saifuddin Zuhri Purwokerto, and IAIN Kudus. Resource persons were selected using the purposive sampling technique: faculty leaders, lecturers, and active students with direct knowledge and experience in implementing MBKM. The purposive sampling technique was used to obtain relevant and in-depth information about the MBKM policy, per the purpose of the research to understand the perception and direct experience of the parties involved in implementing this policy (Etikan, 2016).

The data collection techniques used in this study included semi-structured directed interviews, non-participant observations, and document verification. Semi-structured interviews provide space for researchers to understand the views and experiences of the interviewees related to the implementation of MBKM in-depth, as well as the flexibility to discuss new topics during the interview process (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Participant observation was carried out by being involved in academic activities and socialization of MBKM on campus, which allowed researchers to understand the context and social dynamics directly from the field. In addition, verification is carried out by studying MBKM guideline documents and administrative data to obtain additional information for data triangulation. Triangulation is essential to ensure the validity and credibility of data from various sources (Denzin, 2017).

The collected data is then analyzed using qualitative data analysis methods, according to Miles et al. (2018), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and verification. At the data reduction stage, the researcher encoded and categorized the information collected through in-depth interviews and non-participatory observations to facilitate the identification of the main themes that emerged. At the data presentation stage, the data that has been grouped is arranged in a matrix or narrative format to describe the program's implementation clearly. The final stage is verification,

where researchers conclude from the data that has been presented and compare them with the results of other studies, such as interviews, observations, and documentation. To ensure the credibility of the research results, triangulation of sources and methods and validation of team members was carried out, where informants were asked to confirm the conclusions obtained to increase the findings' reliability and validity (Sharp, 2003).

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results presented in this section focus on institutional and individual factors that affect the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication PTKIN Central Java-DIY. These findings highlight the supporting and inhibiting factors identified during the study.

Institutional Factors Affecting the Implementation of MBKM

Institutional factors determine the success of implementing MBKM policies in religious universities. Research shows that the implementation of the MBKM program is influenced by the internal readiness of the institution, especially in the aspects of policies, resources, leadership, and collaborative communication between units and institutions. Universities that provide straightforward implementation and adequate resources, utilize digital facilities and build strategic communication between leaders, lecturers, students, and partners tend to show a more progressive level of MBKM implementation. On the other hand, obstacles such as inconsistencies in administrative guidelines and budget limitations are serious challenges in the policy adaptation process. The following summary of the institutional factors found in this study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Individual factors supporting and inhibiting MBKM implementation

Factor	Sub factor	Description of Findings	Category
Policies & Regulations	Rules & Procedures	Internal policies on MBKM, MBKM Implementation Guidelines	Supporter
	Cross-Agency Coordination	MoU and benchmarking between universities	Supporter
Communication & Collaboration	Socialization	Socialization at the faculty and study program level, as well as social media	Supporter
	Lecturer-Student Collaboration	Design and execute programs together	Supporter
Curriculum & Guidelines	Curriculum Adjustments	Courses are replaced according to the context of MBKM, credit determination, and conversion.	Supporter
	Procedure Inconsistencies	The administration is not uniform	Retardant
Resources	Digital Facilities	Sistem Information Management (Sikadu, Siakad, Smurt, and OBE applications)	Supporter

	Budget Allocation	Lack of budget for MBKM, funds are given in the form of goods	Retardant
Leadership & Partners	Leadership Support	The outbound policy supports MBKM	Supporter
	Socialization & Input	The involvement of various elements in curriculum adjustments	Supporter
	External Partners	MBKM's willingness to collaborate, recruiting students as permanent employees	Supporter

These findings indicate that the success of implementing MBKM in religious universities depends not only on national policies but also on the readiness and internal cooperation of the institution. The combination of policy support, the use of digital technology, leadership involvement, and effective communication between units are important factors that strengthen the program's implementation. On the other hand, inconsistencies in administrative procedures and budget limitations are obstacles that must be resolved immediately. Therefore, enhancing all stakeholders' institutional capacity and commitment must be encouraged. That way, the implementation of MBKM can run better and sustainably in the religious university environment.

Individual Factors in the Implementation of MBKM: Perception, Motivation, and Resistance

In addition to institutional factors, the individual dimension also plays an essential role in the succession of the MBKM program. The perceptions, motivations, and resistance of lecturers and students show various dynamics that affect their participation. The study results show that lecturer support and student enthusiasm are the main strengths. Barriers such as lack of understanding of the program, differences in value conversion, and personal constraints such as cost and language skills were also found. A summary of individual factors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Individual factors supporting and inhibiting the implementation of MBKM

Factor	Sub factor	Description of Findings	Category
Perception & Understanding	Lecturer Understanding	Lecturers understand and support MBKM without resistance	Supporter
	Student Motivation	Students were initially confused, then enthusiastically involved	Supporter
Resistance & Concerns	Exploration of Knowledge	MBKM opens opportunities for cross-disciplinary learning	Supporter
	Program Value and Duration	Concerns about incomplete value conversions	Retardant
	Practice Ambiguity	Students do not fully understand the MBKM system	Retardant
	Fees and Language	Cost and English language skills are barriers to participation	Retardant

Based on these data, it can be concluded that individual factors significantly contribute to determining the success of MBKM implementation. The support from lecturers and students' enthusiasm shows great potential that can be exploited through increased understanding and appropriate mentoring. However, several obstacles, such as assessment uncertainty, lack of technical knowledge, and cost and language barriers, require systematic handling. Therefore, a personal, adaptive, and communicative approach is needed to cross the gap between perception and individual readiness. Thus, individual involvement in MBKM will be more effective and have a tangible impact on the development of student competencies.

Interplay Between Institutional and Individual Factors in the Implementation of MBKM

Implementing the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* policy at Islamic Universities in Central Java and Yogyakarta is determined by two critical aspects: large-scale strategic communication and flexible bureaucratic structures. Strategic communication here means institutional communication that is comprehensively planned, involving cross-unit socialization, participating with key stakeholders, and utilizing internal digital media to understand the goals and how the MBKM program works. This definition distinguishes strategic communication from ordinary administrative interactions or general interpersonal communication.

This is in line with the policy implementation theory of Pressman & Wildavsky (1973), which emphasizes that policy implementation depends not only on the content of the policy itself but also on the length of the interaction chain of actors who are influenced by the flow of information, coordination, and organizational attachment. Within this framework, communication subsystems must be able to flow data appropriately and sustainably among various policy implementers to prevent distortions in implementation. At PTKIN, regular coordination forums between units, official digital communication channels, and evaluation mechanisms every three months have proven to help integrate understanding related to the interpretation and implementation of MBKM at the faculty and study program levels.

However, the dynamics of MBKM implementation also indicate an imbalance between personal readiness (lecturers and students) and institutional readiness. Although enthusiasm for MBKM is quite high among academics, it is often hampered by non-uniform administrative procedures and limited funds. This indicates the weakness of policy coordination, which is still top-centered and lacks technical detail, as Mazmanian & Sabatier (1983) criticized.

The collaboration between lecturers and students created in the MBKM program reflects a shared commitment, but its effectiveness requires a supportive institutional system. According to Bolman & Deal (2017), organizational effectiveness relies heavily on the compatibility between strategic structures and goals. Here, obstacles arise when the positive perception of the individual is not in line with the logistical and administrative readiness of the institution. This can be seen in the inconsistency between horizontal collaboration already running (between study programs) and vertical coordination that is not optimal (rectorate/dean with technical implementers). To understand these dynamics more clearly, see Table 3. Summarize the main dimensions of interaction between individual and institutional actors.

Table 3. Dynamics of individual–institutional interaction in the implementation of MBKM at PTKIN

Aspects	Dynamics
Expectations and Implementation Synchronization	Students and lecturers are ready to support MBKM but are often constrained by non-uniform procedures and limited budgets.
Collective Commitment	The existence of lecturer-student collaboration reflects a collective commitment, but it needs to be supported by a consistent institutional system.
Perception vs. Institutional Reality	Positive perceptions of individuals are not enough if the institution does not provide an adequate administrative and logistical ecosystem.
Horizontal and Vertical Collaboration	Collaboration between study programs (horizontal) is running, but it is necessary to strengthen vertical collaboration (institutional authorities → lecturers/students).
Sustainability of MBKM Practices	Regulations, budgets, and leadership changes can disrupt sustainability if not designed with a systemic approach.

Policy implementation is a challenging task that requires continuous adaptation. This study found how rigid bureaucratic structures hinder the realization of programs at the faculty level even though support is adequate. Mazmanian and Sabatier once highlighted the importance of flexibility so that the implementation unit can move nimbly to face the dynamics of the field. The CIPP evaluator study also revealed how the centralization of decisions and layered verification slowed down the approval process and the execution of lecturers' and students' activities despite insufficient resources.

Similar findings were revealed by Santoso et al. (2022) through a study at the University of Muhammadiyah Purwokerto. Despite adequate political and budgetary support, the hierarchy still influences the bureaucracy, so it has not fully empowered the implementing unit. The slow approval process due to consecutive verifications and lack of delegation is an obstacle to performance. Continuous adaptation is needed so that the supporting structure can accommodate the principles of flexibility and autonomy in implementing policies from the faculty level to the field.

The application of Kurt Lewin's theory of organizational change and the Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze stage model provides a strong analytical framework to understand the internal dynamics of PTKIN in responding to the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* policy. According to this model, effective organizational change requires the easing of old norms (unfreezing), followed by a phase of active transformation (change), and finally, the formation of a new established norm (refreezing) (Lewin, 1951).

In the easing phase, PTKIN, through the Quality Assurance Agency (*Lembaga Penjaminan Mutu / LPM*), carried out intensive socialization on the meaning and urgency of the MBKM policy, which succeeded in shifting the paradigm of staff and lecturers from a bureaucratic administrative orientation to a flexible user-oriented service. This is important in breaking resistance to change and forming a new consciousness. The transformation stage is characterized by the digital formulation of SOPs, technical training on using the MBKM platform, and adjustments to workflows

that were initially vertical to more collaborative horizontally. This process aligns with Lewin's theory that real change requires transforming value systems and operational structures rather than just formal instructions. Furthermore, in the formation phase, these positive practices began to be institutionalized by establishing standards in the LPM and became part of the quality audit routine. The change is considered institutionalized when the new behavior is accepted and becomes a work culture. This is consistent with Lewin's opinion that change will not continue unless it is followed by the formation of new norms that are strengthened through formal systems and social reinforcement.

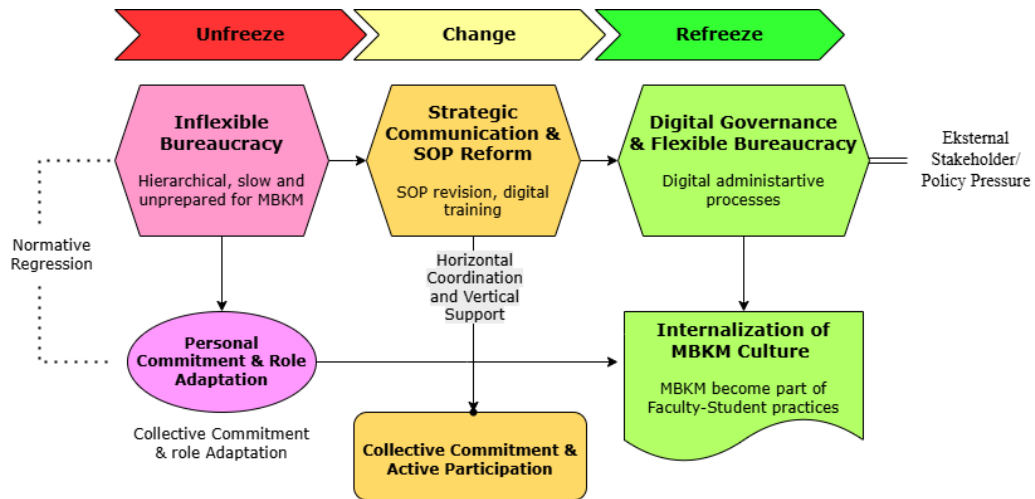


Figure 1. Interaction of institutional structure and individual readiness in implementing MBKM, adapted from Lewin's change model and policy implementation theory

Figure 1 presents a visual model of MBKM implementation at PTKIN, integrating Lewin's change theory with institutional–individual dynamics. It emphasizes how institutional flexibility supports individual engagement and warns of potential regression without systemic reinforcement, highlighting the importance of aligning structure, communication, and participation for sustainable reform.

Analysis from Nofia (2020) research revealed that implementing MBKM in PTKIN faces significant challenges, such as limited infrastructure, confusion of cooperation mechanisms across higher education institutions, and weak bureaucratic readiness. However, in the context of organizational transformation, Nofia emphasized that the MBKM policy cannot only be seen as a technical document but also needs to be accompanied by a comprehensive change in culture and structure in higher education institutions. This reinforces Lewin's argument that real change is not enough to be top-down; it must involve participation and internalization of new values for all institution members. Meanwhile, the findings of Hanapi et al. (2023) in Lombok show that the failure of the normalization process is one of the root problems of MBKM implementation. The unpreparedness of the academic structure, the weak external partners, and the lack of socialization cause the changes to be superficial and do not touch the aspects of deep academic culture. In Lewin's view, organizations tend to revert to old patterns without a robust normalization process, creating "normative regressions" that hinder the implementation of change.

Comparative analysis of previous research shows that the success of MBKM implementation in PTKIN Central Java and DI Yogyakarta is determined not solely by

the availability of resources but by the close interaction between institutional communication systems and adaptive bureaucratic structures. Sitorus et al. (2023) highlighted the lack of technical systems and internal coordination that caused the implementation of MBKM not to run optimally even though there was already a policy from the central government. Bisri et al. (2023), through a study of 15 private universities in East Java, identified weak socialization, passive institutional policies, and infrastructure limitations as the main obstacles, which in this study can be overcome through strengthening strategic communication and bureaucratic flexibility. Meanwhile, Santoso et al. (2022) emphasized that too hierarchical bureaucracy is the dominant inhibiting factor in implementing MBKM at Mulawarman University, even though quantitative analysis shows that the relationship between variables is powerful ($R^2 = 0.828$). The findings reinforce the results of this study that the effectiveness of MBKM depends not only on policies or resources but also on the extent to which institutional design can bridge technical complexity, accelerate decision-making processes, and build cross-unit understanding through a systematic and sustainable communication system.

Thus, from the perspective of policy implementation theory, the success of MBKM in PTKIN depends on integrated management between communication subsystems and adaptive organizational structures. Policy recommendations that can be proposed to strengthen the sustainability of the program include 1) a cross-ministerial coordination team to accelerate MBKM, 2) institutionalization of long-term partnerships through formal MoU, and 3) strengthening a digital governance system to streamline administrative processes. These strategies encourage early adoption and strengthen the sustainability and quality improvement of MBKM programs in the future.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the successful implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* program at the Faculty of Da'wah and Communication of PTKIN in the Central Java and DI Yogyakarta regions cannot be separated from the synergistic interaction between strategic institutional communication and adaptive bureaucratic structure. The findings show that consistent inter-unit coordination, concise digital procedures, and clear delegation of authority greatly influence the active involvement of lecturers and students in various MBKM schemes. The alignment of the MBKM program into the curriculum and online learning system also allows for flexibility in implementation without sacrificing key academic activities.

Theoretically, these findings support the Pressman & Wildavsky framework that policy effectiveness depends on the functioning of communication subsystems and inter-stakeholder relationships. Meanwhile, Mazmanian & Sabatier's theories are relevant in demonstrating the importance of organizational structure flexibility in anticipating implementation barriers. Furthermore, institutional changes in the context of MBKM in PTKIN are also reflected through Lewin's Unfreeze–Change–Refreeze model, where internal socialization, restructuring procedures, and institutionalization of digital practices show that change has undergone a phase of refreezing as a permanent policy. In this case, the change is not only administrative but has also touched the mindset and habits of the organization.

Compared to previous research, this study places more emphasis on coordination-structural aspects rather than just resource constraints. While other studies highlight a

lack of funding and human resources as the main obstacles, this study underscores that without responsive structures and well-managed cross-unit communication, opportunities for participation in MBKM will remain hampered, regardless of the adequacy of resources. This research is contextual and exploratory, limited to specific regions, and does not yet include actors such as alumni or national policymakers. For further development, it is recommended to expand the study area, use a longitudinal approach, and combine quantitative and qualitative methods to obtain a more comprehensive and representative picture of the implementation of MBKM in various contexts of PTKIN.

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