



Integrating Urban Sufism Values into the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Curriculum: A Case Study of an Islamic Higher Education Institution

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum has encouraged higher education institutions to develop flexible learning systems while maintaining their institutional identity and values. For Islamic higher education institutions, the challenge is not only adapting to the MBKM policy but also integrating distinctive religious values into curriculum development. This study analyzes the integration of urban Sufism values into the MBKM curriculum at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya, an Islamic higher education institution with a pesantren-based identity. This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through curriculum document analysis, observation, and interviews with institutional stakeholders. Data analysis used data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that the integration of urban Sufism values in the MBKM curriculum is implemented through three main processes: (1) incorporating Sufism-based values into curriculum components, (2) internalizing values through learning activities and academic culture, and (3) actualizing these values in students' daily lives. The values integrated into the curriculum include piety, honesty, sincerity, perseverance, ethical conduct, consistency, self-discipline, and responsibility. This study shows that integrating urban Sufism values provides a distinctive model for implementing MBKM in Islamic higher education institutions by balancing academic competence development with spiritual and moral formation.

Keywords: Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka; curriculum transformation; urban Sufism; Islamic higher education; pesantren-based university

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions are currently experiencing significant transformation due to rapid changes in science, technology, social dynamics, and labor market demands. Universities are no longer expected only to transmit knowledge but also to develop students' competencies, character, and adaptive capacities. In response, many countries have encouraged higher education reform through curriculum innovation that emphasizes flexibility, student-centered learning, and interdisciplinary experiences (Barnett, 2018). In Indonesia, this transformation is represented by the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2020.

The MBKM policy offers students opportunities to gain learning experiences beyond their primary study programs through various activities, including internships, student exchanges, research projects, teaching assistance, entrepreneurship programs, humanitarian projects, independent projects, and village development programs (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020). Through this policy, higher education institutions are encouraged to redesign their curricula to become more flexible and responsive to external changes. Previous studies show that MBKM can improve students' competencies, broaden learning experiences, and strengthen graduates' readiness to face professional challenges (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021; Mariati, 2021).



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However, curriculum transformation through MBKM is not merely a matter of modifying learning structures or adding new academic activities. Curriculum development is closely tied to institutional philosophy, educational goals, and values that shape an institution's identity. Curriculum is not only a technical instrument for achieving learning outcomes but also a cultural and ideological representation that reflects what an institution considers important to transmit to its students (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018). Therefore, implementing MBKM raises an important issue for higher education institutions: how to adopt national curriculum policies while maintaining distinctive institutional values.

This issue becomes particularly relevant for Islamic higher education institutions. Unlike general higher education institutions that primarily emphasize academic and professional competence, Islamic universities also have a responsibility to develop students' moral, ethical, and spiritual dimensions. Islamic higher education is expected to produce graduates who possess not only intellectual abilities but also religious awareness and noble character (Nata, 2020). Consequently, curriculum development in Islamic universities requires a balanced integration between scientific competence and Islamic values.

Previous studies regarding Islamic education have highlighted the importance of value internalization as an essential component of educational processes. Value-based education plays an important role in shaping students' moral awareness, ethical behavior, and social responsibility (Lickona, 1991). In Islamic educational contexts, the integration of religious values into the curriculum has been considered a strategy to strengthen students' character formation and prevent education from becoming solely oriented toward cognitive achievement (Tolchah, 2020). Nevertheless, existing studies have mostly focused on Islamic values integration within Islamic learning subjects or school-level education. In contrast, studies examining the integration of spiritual values into flexible higher education curricula such as MBKM remain limited.

One distinctive context for this issue is Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya (IAF). IAF is an Islamic higher education institution that has developed its institutional identity based on tasawuf-tarekat values. The transformation from Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam (STAI) Al Fithrah to Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya did not erase its identity as a tasawuf-oriented institution; instead, it encouraged strengthening its institutional characteristics through curriculum development. The integration of tasawuf values into the MBKM curriculum is an interesting phenomenon because it shows how Islamic spiritual traditions can interact with contemporary higher education policies.

The concept of urban Sufism provides an important theoretical perspective in understanding this phenomenon. Urban Sufism refers to the adaptation and practice of Sufi values within modern urban environments, where spirituality is not separated from contemporary social life but becomes a source of ethical orientation and personal development (Howell, 2007). Unlike classical perceptions that associate Sufism with withdrawal from worldly affairs, urban Sufism emphasizes practicing spirituality in everyday activities, including professional, social, and educational contexts (Bruinessen & Howell, 2007). Therefore, integrating urban Sufism values into higher education curriculum represents an attempt to contextualize spiritual education within modern academic environments.

At IAF Surabaya, urban Sufism values derived from the teachings of K.H. Ahmad Asrori Al Ishaqy serve as the philosophical foundation for strengthening institutional identity. These values include piety, honesty, sincerity, perseverance, ethical conduct, consistency, discipline, responsibility, and avoiding actions that do not provide meaningful benefits. Integrating these values into the MBKM curriculum reflects an effort to ensure that curriculum flexibility does not reduce the institution's spiritual characteristics.

Although previous studies have discussed MBKM implementation and Islamic value-based education separately, research on how spiritual values can be integrated into MBKM-based curriculum transformation in Islamic higher education institutions remains limited. Existing MBKM studies generally focus on implementation challenges, student readiness, and competency development (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021; Mariati, 2021), while studies on tasawuf education primarily discuss moral development and spiritual

formation (Yaqin & Muhid, 2022). The relationship between MBKM curriculum innovation and tasawuf-based institutional identity therefore remains underexplored.

Based on this research gap, this study aims to analyze the integration of urban Sufism values into the MBKM curriculum at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya. Specifically, this research examines (1) how urban Sufism values are incorporated into curriculum development, (2) how these values are internalized through academic processes, and (3) how curriculum transformation strengthens the institutional identity of an Islamic higher education institution. This study contributes theoretically by expanding discussions of curriculum transformation through the lens of spiritual and cultural identity, while practically offering an alternative model for Islamic higher education institutions seeking to implement MBKM without losing their distinctive values.

2. METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to explore and understand how the institution integrated urban Sufism values into the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum within a specific institutional context. The case study design was appropriate because the research focused on a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life educational setting: curriculum transformation at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya, an Islamic higher education institution with a pesantren-based identity (Yin, 2018).

The case study approach enables researchers to investigate the complexity of educational practices, including institutional policies, curriculum development processes, and value internalization mechanisms. In this study, the case was defined as the transformation of the MBKM curriculum based on urban Sufism values implemented at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. The institution was purposively selected because it is an Islamic higher education institution that integrates tasawuf-tarekat values into its educational system. The institutional transformation from STAI Al Fithrah to Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya maintained and strengthened its identity as a higher education institution grounded in tasawuf values.

The researchers selected participants using purposive sampling based on their involvement in and understanding of curriculum development and MBKM implementation. Participants included institutional leaders, curriculum developers, lecturers, and students involved in implementing MBKM activities. Participant selection aimed to gather comprehensive information on curriculum planning, implementation strategies, and students' experiences in internalizing urban Sufism values.

Data Collection

Techniques: Data were collected through three main techniques: interviews, observation, and document analysis.

First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with relevant institutional stakeholders to explore their perspectives on integrating urban Sufism values into the MBKM curriculum. Interviews focused on curriculum development policies, value integration strategies, and challenges encountered during implementation.

Second, observations examined how institutional values were reflected in academic activities and student interactions. Observations focused on how the institution implemented its culture and on students' daily practices related to internalizing tasawuf values.

Third, the study analyzed relevant institutional documents, including curriculum guidelines, academic regulations, MBKM implementation documents, and institutional references related to tasawuf values. Document analysis identified the philosophical and structural foundations underlying the development of the MBKM curriculum.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification.

Data condensation involved selecting, simplifying, and organizing relevant information from interviews, observations, and documents. The condensed data were then presented in thematic categories related to curriculum transformation, value integration, and internalization processes.

The final stage involved drawing conclusions and verifying findings by comparing data from different sources. This process was conducted continuously throughout the research to ensure that the findings represented the actual conditions of MBKM curriculum implementation at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Urban Sufism Values as the Philosophical Foundation of MBKM Curriculum Development

The transformation of the MBKM curriculum at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya is not merely an adaptation to national higher education policies but also an effort to strengthen institutional identity through the integration of urban Sufism values. The findings indicate that IAF's MBKM curriculum development is based on the understanding that the curriculum should function not only as a framework for developing students' academic competencies but also as a medium for transmitting spiritual and ethical values.

The integration of urban Sufism values is reflected in the institutional commitment to maintain tasawuf-tarekat characteristics as the distinctive identity of Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya. The institution believes curriculum transformation must remain connected to the philosophical foundation established since its early development as an Islamic higher education institution. Therefore, MBKM implementation at IAF does not replace the institution's existing spiritual orientation but creates a new space for contextualizing tasawuf values within contemporary higher education.

This finding confirms that curriculum transformation involves more than structural changes in learning systems. Curriculum development also involves negotiating institutional identity, cultural values, and educational goals. Ornstein and Hunkins (2018) explain that curriculum reflects an institution's philosophical assumptions about knowledge, learning, and the characteristics of the graduates it seeks to develop. In this context, the MBKM curriculum at IAF attempts to integrate competency-based education with spiritual character formation.

Based on curriculum documents and institutional values, the urban Sufism values integrated into the MBKM curriculum include several character dimensions: piety, honesty, sincerity, perseverance, ethical conduct, consistency, discipline, responsibility, and avoiding activities that do not provide meaningful benefits. These values derive from the teachings of K.H. Ahmad Asrori Al Ishaqy, which emphasize forming students who possess intellectual ability while maintaining spiritual awareness.

Integrating these values shows that urban Sufism functions as a philosophical foundation rather than merely an additional component of the curriculum. In other words, tasawuf values guide how students develop knowledge, behave academically, and interact socially. This finding supports Howell's (2007) perspective on urban Sufism, which argues that Sufi practices in modern contexts are not separated from social realities but are expressed through everyday ethical practices.

Therefore, the MBKM curriculum at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya can be understood as a value-based curriculum transformation model, combining national curriculum flexibility with institutional spiritual identity. This approach offers an alternative perspective: curriculum innovation in Islamic higher education does not necessarily require abandoning traditional religious values but can instead reinterpret them within contemporary educational frameworks.

3.2 Strategies for Internalizing Urban Sufism Values in MBKM Implementation

Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya integrates urban Sufism values into the MBKM curriculum through a gradual internalization process. The findings indicate that value integration does not occur only through curriculum documents but also through academic interactions, institutional culture, and students' daily experiences. This process demonstrates that curriculum-based value education requires continuous interaction between formal curriculum structures and informal educational environments.

The first stage of internalization is the value transformation stage, in which institutions introduce and communicate values to students through academic regulations, curriculum components, and learning activities. At this stage, lecturers and institutional leaders transmit values by explaining the meaning and relevance of urban Sufism principles in relation to students' academic responsibilities. The values introduced include sincerity, discipline, perseverance, responsibility, and ethical behavior.

The value transformation stage reflects the curriculum's role as a medium for transmitting institutional philosophy. Rather than treating tasawuf values as separate religious knowledge, Institut Al Fithrah integrates them into the institution's broader educational objectives. This approach aligns with value-based curriculum development, which emphasizes that educational goals should include not only cognitive achievement but also the development of attitudes and character (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

The second stage is the value transaction stage, which involves interaction between lecturers and students as they understand and practice institutional values. The findings show that students internalize urban Sufism values through academic communication, mentoring relationships, and institutional culture. Lecturers not only deliver knowledge but also become role models who demonstrate ethical and spiritual behaviors in academic environments.

This finding highlights educators' importance as moral agents in Islamic higher education. Value internalization becomes more effective when students see consistency between institutional messages and educators' behavior. As Lickona (1991) explains, character education requires role models because values are taught not only through instruction but also through social experiences and examples.

The third stage is the value internalization stage, where students begin to demonstrate these values as part of their personal and academic identity. At this stage, urban Sufism values are no longer perceived as external institutional requirements but become principles that guide students' attitudes and behaviors. This internalization is reflected in students' discipline in academic activities, respect for lecturers, commitment to learning, and responsibility in carrying out academic tasks.

The findings indicate that MBKM implementation at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya provides a broader context for value internalization. Although MBKM emphasizes learning freedom and experiences outside the classroom, the institution maintains its spiritual orientation by ensuring that students' learning experiences remain connected with ethical and religious values. Therefore, MBKM becomes not only a mechanism for competency development but also a platform for character formation.

This finding expands previous discussions on MBKM implementation, which have mainly focused on learning flexibility, student mobility, and competency development (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021; Mariati, 2021). The case of Institut Al Fithrah shows that MBKM can also strengthen institutional identity when implemented through a value-based curriculum framework.

3.3 Student Actualization of Urban Sufism Values in Academic Life

The internalization of urban Sufism values within the MBKM curriculum is reflected in students' academic and social practices. The findings indicate that the values integrated into the curriculum are not limited to conceptual understanding but are manifested through students' daily behaviors and interactions within the institutional environment. This demonstrates that curriculum transformation at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya operates through both formal curriculum structures and cultural practices that shape students' academic identity.

One of the main values reflected in students' academic life is the integration of piety, honesty, and sincerity. Students demonstrate these values through their commitment to following institutional

regulations, fulfilling academic responsibilities, and maintaining ethical behavior in learning activities. At Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya, students' obedience to institutional rules is understood not merely as administrative compliance but as part of the educational relationship among students, lecturers, and institutional values. Discipline and responsibility become a manifestation of spiritual awareness in academic life.

This finding indicates that spiritual values can function as an ethical framework in higher education. Rather than separating religious values from academic activities, Institut Al Fithrah integrates spirituality into students' learning experiences. This approach is consistent with the concept of Islamic higher education, which views knowledge development as inseparable from moral and spiritual responsibility (Nata, 2020).

Another important finding relates to the actualization of perseverance (*mujāhadah*), self-discipline (*riyāḍah*), and commitment to continuous learning. Students demonstrate these values through their seriousness in participating in lectures, completing academic tasks, and engaging in institutional activities. The values of *mujāhadah* and *riyāḍah* encourage students to understand learning as a continuous process that requires effort, patience, and consistency. Therefore, academic achievement is viewed not only as an intellectual outcome but also as a result of personal discipline and spiritual commitment.

The findings also reveal the importance of ethical conduct and exemplary behavior (*akhlāq* and *uswah ḥasanah*) among students. Students are expected to demonstrate respectful communication, politeness, and positive interaction with lecturers and peers. These behaviors represent the practical manifestation of institutional values that emphasize moral development alongside academic competence. Previous studies have emphasized that character formation in education requires not only the delivery of moral concepts but also opportunities for students to practice these values within their social environment (Lickona, 1991).

Furthermore, students' actualization of urban Sufism values is reflected in their efforts to avoid actions considered inconsistent with institutional moral principles, such as irresponsible behavior, academic negligence, and activities that do not provide meaningful benefits. This orientation reflects the concept of self-control within Sufi teachings, where individuals are encouraged to manage their actions and prioritize activities that contribute positively to personal and social development.

The student actualization findings show that integrating urban Sufism values creates a distinctive academic culture at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya. The MBKM curriculum, which generally emphasizes flexibility and external learning experiences, is implemented within a cultural framework that maintains spiritual orientation. Thus, students' learning freedom is accompanied by ethical responsibility and personal discipline.

This finding broadens understanding of MBKM implementation in Islamic higher education. While previous studies have emphasized MBKM as a strategy for improving students' competencies and professional readiness (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021; Mariati, 2021), Institut Al Fithrah's experience shows that MBKM can also strengthen students' moral and spiritual development when supported by institutional values.

3.4 Curriculum Transformation as Institutional Identity Strengthening

The implementation of MBKM at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya demonstrates that curriculum transformation does not necessarily lead to the loss of institutional identity. Instead, when grounded in a strong philosophical foundation, curriculum transformation can strengthen institutional characteristics. The findings indicate that integrating urban Sufism values enables IAF to adopt the flexibility of MBKM while maintaining its identity as an Islamic higher education institution grounded in *tasawuf-tarekat* traditions.

The institutional identity of Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya is reflected through the integration of *tasawuf* values into curriculum components, learning processes, and academic culture. The transformation from

STAI Al Fithrah into Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya encouraged the institution to respond to national higher education developments while maintaining its distinctive orientation. Therefore, the adoption of MBKM was not interpreted as replacing institutional values but as an opportunity to contextualize those values within contemporary higher education practices.

The findings reveal that urban Sufism functions as an institutional identity framework that guides the implementation of MBKM. While MBKM emphasizes student autonomy, interdisciplinary learning, and experiences beyond the classroom, IAF provides a spiritual and ethical framework that directs how students utilize these learning opportunities. In this sense, learning freedom is accompanied by moral responsibility, and competency development is integrated with character formation.

This finding expands the understanding of curriculum transformation in higher education. Previous perspectives often view curriculum transformation primarily as a response to external demands, such as technological development, industry needs, and changes in professional competencies (Barnett, 2018). However, Institut Al Fithrah shows that curriculum transformation can also emerge from internal institutional values. The curriculum becomes a space where external policy demands and internal cultural identity interact.

Integrating urban Sufism values into MBKM also illustrates the contextualization of Islamic educational traditions within modern higher education. Urban Sufism demonstrates that spiritual values are not incompatible with contemporary academic environments but can provide ethical foundations for navigating modern challenges (Howell, 2007). From this perspective, tasawuf is not a separate religious element but a framework that shapes students' attitudes toward knowledge, learning, and social responsibility.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the institutional identity strengthening process occurs through three interconnected dimensions. First, the philosophical dimension, where tasawuf values become the foundation of curriculum orientation. Second, the pedagogical dimension, where lecturers integrate these values into learning interactions. Third, the cultural dimension, where students practice these values through academic and social activities. These three dimensions demonstrate that institutional identity is constructed not only through formal statements but through continuous educational practices.

The case of Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya provides an alternative model for Islamic higher education institutions in implementing MBKM. Rather than perceiving national curriculum policies and institutional religious identity as competing interests, IAF demonstrates that both can be integrated through a value-based curriculum approach. This finding contributes to the discussion of higher education curriculum development by showing that curriculum flexibility can coexist with institutional uniqueness.

Therefore, the transformation of MBKM curriculum at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya can be understood as a process of identity strengthening rather than identity replacement. Integrating urban Sufism values enables the institution to participate in national higher education transformation while preserving its distinctive educational philosophy.

4. CONCLUSION

Study concludes that the transformation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum at Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya represents not only an adaptation to national higher education policy but also a process of strengthening institutional identity through the integration of urban Sufism values. The findings show that IAF's curriculum transformation integrates spiritual, ethical, and academic dimensions, allowing MBKM implementation to remain aligned with the institution's distinctive identity as an Islamic higher education institution based on tasawuf-tarekat values. The integration of urban Sufism values is implemented through three main processes: curriculum integration, value internalization through academic interactions, and student actualization in daily life. The values incorporated into the curriculum include piety, honesty, sincerity, perseverance, ethical conduct, consistency, discipline, responsibility, and self-control. These values function not merely as additional moral teachings but as a philosophical foundation that guides curriculum implementation and shapes students' academic behavior. The findings contribute to

the discussion of higher education curriculum transformation by demonstrating that MBKM implementation can be contextualized within the cultural and spiritual identity of Islamic higher education institutions. Rather than viewing curriculum modernization and religious identity as contradictory, this study shows that a value-based curriculum approach can integrate both dimensions. Practically, this study offers an alternative perspective for Islamic higher education institutions to implement flexible learning policies while maintaining institutional characteristics. Institut Al Fithrah Surabaya's experience indicates that curriculum innovation can strengthen institutional identity when supported by a clear philosophical foundation and consistent value internalization strategies. However, this study is limited to one Islamic higher education institution; therefore, further research involving multiple institutions is needed to develop a broader understanding of how spiritual values can be integrated into MBKM implementation across diverse Islamic higher education contexts.

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Data Availability

The source manuscript does not specify a public repository or access procedure for the underlying observation, interview, and documentation data. The authors should provide an appropriate data-availability statement that reflects applicable ethical and privacy restrictions.

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