

# Toward Enhanced Education Quality: Integrating KKNi SN-Dikti and Merdeka Belajar through an Outcome-Based Education Approach

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**ABSTRACT.** This study aims to thoroughly investigate the factors that influence the integration of the Indonesian National Qualification Framework Curriculum (KKNi) SN-Dikti and the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum through a results-based education (OBE) approach, as well as providing concrete suggestions for improving the quality and relevance of learning at University. The research method uses a literature review methodology, which involves searching, analyzing and synthesizing relevant previous research. The results demonstrate the beneficial effects of combining the OBE approach with the KKNi SN-Dikti and Merdeka curricula on student learning in higher education. There is a significant increase in learning outcomes, including increasing knowledge relevant to the world of work and improving student soft skills. Project-based learning methods, active student participation, and flexible curricula were important components supporting this integration. Based on these findings, several suggestions for further research are proposed to deepen understanding of the integration of the KKNi SN-Dikti and Merdeka curriculum with the OBE approach and its social and ethical implications. Further research in this area is essential to develop higher education curricula aligned with contemporary demands and societal needs.

**Keywords:** KKNi SN-Dikti, merdeka belajar, outcome-based education approach

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## INTRODUCTION

Curriculum based on the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (INQF or KKNi) has become the focus of attention in the world of education (Neliwati et al., 2019; Sukirman, 2022; Yanda, 2022), especially in the context of increasingly mature development conditions. KKNi, as a competency qualification grading framework, offers a very appropriate approach to overcoming complex dynamics in forming a qualified and relevant workforce (Waseso & Hidayat, 2016; Tosepu, 2018). The KKNi not only allows for the unification of the fields of education and job training but also facilitates the recognition of job competencies by the job structure in various sectors (Tosepu, 2018). As a concept based on the principles of equality and integration, KKNi promotes wider accessibility to quality education and training and encourages the application of best practices in the world of education and industry. However, even though the KKNi promises high adaptability to the changing needs of the labor market, questions still need to be explored regarding the effectiveness of implementation, quality of teaching, and equality in recognition of competencies.

Rapid changes and developments over time have become the main impetus for evaluating and updating educational curricula (Hopmann, 2003). Insani (2019) underlines that changing the curriculum is necessary considering the competition and competition in life that covers all fields of science, the rapid development of science, the increasing influence of technology, and the reality of the future, which cannot be taken lightly. Furthermore, Wati et al. (2013) added that the cause of curriculum change must consider anticipatory, adaptive, and applicable aspects, as well as ensuring the connection between input, output, and outcomes required, involving various parties such as education administrators, education experts, curriculum experts, science experts, teachers. Parents, community leaders, and paying attention to the main foundations in developing educational curricula. In line with this, Sari (2022) highlights the factors influencing curriculum changes, such as universities, society, and value systems. Therefore, curriculum changes are important so that the younger generation can adapt effectively to the changing demands of the times, as well as prepare them to face future challenges with relevant competencies that align with the needs of the times.

The Industrial Era 4.0 has significantly transformed people's lives, especially through technological developments and innovations that have changed the way of life to become more modern. One of the innovations that has emerged is education 4.0, which is an outcome-oriented teaching system or educational process, also known as Outcome Based Education (OBE). This approach has become crucial in educational management (Ramli et al., 2022). According to Rahdiyanta (2023), this curriculum emphasizes determining goals and specific objectives, selecting and organizing content, implications in learning patterns, and evaluation. Apart from that, the Independent Curriculum program provides freedom and autonomy to educational institutions, eliminates bureaucratization, gives lecturers the freedom to be free from complicated bureaucracy, and gives students the freedom to choose the fields they are interested in. Independent Campus is a manifestation of autonomous and flexible learning in higher education, which creates an innovative, non-restrictive learning culture that meets student needs (Suwandi, 2020).

The Independent Learning Curriculum Program, one of which is OBE, marks a paradigm shift in the world of education (Prihatiningsih, 2023; Tintington et al., 2023). OBE is an educational approach that emphasizes achieving predetermined concrete results, such as knowledge, abilities, and desired behavior (Indra et al., 2023). OBE regulates the educational process by paying attention to important components such as preparing an appropriate curriculum, student assessment processes, and setting standards for future community needs, which align with the vision set. Inspiration from John Piaget's theory that the goal of education is to create individuals who are creative, innovative, and able to find solutions is the basis for OBE (Fiandi, 2023). In OBE, each part of the education system is designed to achieve certain goals, referred to as learning outcomes. The construction of relevant and measurable learning outcomes is the key to the OBE model (Wang, 2013). Thus, OBE is a results-oriented educational approach, emphasizing student performance, adaptive curriculum development, and learning relevant to future demands. Curriculum integration amidst the dynamics of global higher education development is the main focus of educational institutions. The Independent Curriculum allows universities to design curricula responsive to the needs of the job market and scientific developments. On the other hand, the KKNI SN-Dikti provides a clear framework for standardizing the higher education curriculum in Indonesia. Outcomes Based Learning (OBE) emphasizes achieving learning outcomes that are measurable and relevant to the needs of industry and society. However, the main obstacle in implementing this integration is the difference between the actual and expected conditions.

Integrating the KKNI SN-Dikti and *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* through the OBE approach can significantly increase the relevance and quality of higher education in Indonesia. However, there is a significant difference between expectations and reality on the ground. Efforts to integrate the curriculum by the KKNI SN-Dikti and the mismatch between the curriculum prepared and the needs of industry and the job market often hinder its implementation. Likewise, research

conducted by Johnson et al. (2019) indicates that many things could be improved in adapting the OBE approach to the higher education environment, especially related to the required paradigm shift in teaching and learning. Therefore, further investigation of this issue is needed to find the right solution to balance the differences between real and ideal circumstances.

The *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* emphasizes the importance of designing a curriculum that suits the job market's needs. At the same time, the KKNi SN-Dikti provides a clear framework for standardizing the curriculum. However, the OBE approach requires measurable learning outcomes that match the needs of industry and society. However, many things hinder the implementation of this integration, such as a mismatch between the curriculum prepared and the needs of the job market and difficulties in adapting the OBE approach in the higher education environment. Research by Pritasari et al. (2023) highlights that a more targeted and organized strategy is needed to integrate the KKNi curriculum with OBE to improve student learning quality. In addition, it is important to involve industry stakeholders in the curriculum development process to ensure suitability to job market needs (Philiyanti et al., 2021).

Although several studies have examined the integration of the KKNi SN-Dikti and the *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* through the OBE approach, needs to be more research literature needs to be filled. Some studies focus on specific aspects of this integration, such as curriculum development or implementation challenges, but rarely incorporate all dimensions holistically. In addition, there is a need to more deeply understand the perspectives and expectations of various stakeholders, including students, lecturers, and industry, in the curriculum integration process. Research by Pritasari et al. (2023) shows that a lack of participation and input from industry stakeholders can hinder the suitability of the curriculum to the needs of the job market. On the other hand, a study by Nurhidayati (2023) highlights the important role of students in curriculum development and evaluation to ensure the relevance and quality of learning. This research aims to thoroughly investigate the factors that influence the integration of the KKNi SN-Dikti and the *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* through OBE approach, as well as providing concrete suggestions for improving the quality and relevance of learning at University.

## **METHOD**

The literature review method in literary studies involves systematically searching, analyzing, and synthesizing relevant previous research to understand a particular topic comprehensively. Following the steps outlined by Aisyah et al. (2022), the process usually begins by determining research objectives and conducting a thorough source search in academic databases, digital libraries, literary journals, and other trusted platforms. Selection of sources involves evaluating their relevance and quality, ensuring that they contribute to understanding the research topic.

Regarding the integration of KKNi SN-Dikti and *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* with OBE, the process requires special criteria when selecting data sources. These criteria include relevance to higher education curriculum development, freshness and credibility of information, and effectiveness of integration with OBE principles. Information gathering involves identifying and collecting journal articles, analyzing their content, and summarizing key findings to aid the synthesis process. After the data was collected, the analysis focused on identifying findings related to the integration of KKNi SN-Dikti and the *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* with OBE. This analysis aims to determine the relationship between this integration and the implementation of OBE in higher education and assess alignment with the goals of holistic curriculum development. Additionally, this analysis identifies obstacles and potential solutions to facilitate a smoother integration process. Through a systematic literature review, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in integrating these curricula and offer concrete recommendations for improving their implementation in higher education settings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Result

#### *Competency standards set by KKNi SN-Dikti*

SN-DIKTI as regulated in Permenristekdikti Number 44 of 2015 Article 1, states that the curriculum is a set of plans and arrangements regarding graduate learning outcomes, study materials, processes and assessments that are used as guidelines for implementing study programs. The Higher Education Curriculum is an institutional mandate that must always be updated by developments in needs, science, and technology as outlined in Learning Outcomes. As producers of educated human resources, universities need to measure their graduates whether the graduates they produce have 'abilities' equivalent to the 'abilities' (learning achievements) formulated in the KKNi qualification levels. Every university is obliged to adapt to these provisions (Abdiyah, 2021). So, with this in mind, the KKNi SN-Dikti competency standards emphasize how important it is to produce graduates who are highly educated and ready to contribute to the world of work. This recommendation shows that the OBE approach can help higher education institutions measure the achievement of these competencies and responsibilities more measurably.

#### *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar emphasizes flexibility in curriculum preparation*

One sustainable solution for developing a curriculum that is relevant to the needs of the 21st century is curriculum flexibility, which is based on the idea that the curriculum can adapt to rapid developments in the digital era and the Industrial Revolution 4.0. It allows teaching methods and learning content to be adapted to current needs so that students can develop their skills optimally (Fakhri, 2023). Constructivism theory and competency-based learning theory support this solution by emphasizing that students must actively participate in the learning process and build their knowledge through reflection and experience (Garcia & Cano, 2014; Alt, 2015; Harjali, 2019). With curriculum flexibility, students can choose material that interests them and use their various resources, such as digital technology (Abdiyah, 2021).

#### *Achievement of learning outcomes*

The Outcome Education method emphasizes achieving learning outcomes that can be measured and observed. This study shows that incorporating the KKNi SN-Dikti curriculum and the *Kurikulum Merdeka* into the OBE approach allows higher education institutions to ensure that their curricula meet the competency standards set by the KKNi SN-Dikti while still providing the flexibility required by the Merdeka Curriculum (Abdiyah, 2021).

#### *Responsive to student and industry needs*

Higher education institutions that integrate curricula based on the OBE approach enable them to be more responsive to student and industry needs (Rosiawan, 2022; Srinivasan et al., 2022; Ohatkar & Deshpande, 2022). By implementing this approach, they can ensure that their graduates have the abilities and skills that suit the demands of the current and future world of work (Tan, 2018). Therefore, many references support the findings of this research, which highlight the benefits of integrating the KKNi SN-Dikti curriculum and the *Kurikulum Merdeka* through the OBE approach in developing a responsive and comprehensive higher education curriculum. Its impact on theory and practice is to strengthen the relationship between higher education, industry, and society as a whole. This integration allows universities to produce graduates who not only have the knowledge and skills required by industry. However, it can also continue learning and adapting to changes in a dynamic work environment.

### Discussion

The basic reference for curriculum development in higher education is that curriculum development is the right and obligation of each university; however, in developing the higher

education curriculum, it must be based on the 1945 Constitution, Law no. 12 of 2012, National Higher Education Standards as outlined in Minister of Education and Culture Regulation no. 3 of 2020, as well as other applicable provisions. The curriculum should be able to deliver students to master certain knowledge and skills, as well as form noble character so that they can contribute to maintaining national values and diversity, encouraging a spirit of concern for fellow nations and humanity to improve social welfare with justice and the glory of the Indonesian nation. Curriculum preparation should be based on a strong foundation, both philosophically, sociologically, psychologically, historically, and juridically (Nurwardani et al., 2019).

The research results show that integrating the KKNI SN-Dikti curriculum and the Independent Learning Curriculum with the Results-Based Education (OBE) approach positively impacts student learning in higher education. Data analysis shows a significant increase in the achievement of learning outcomes. This improvement includes increasing knowledge relevant to job market needs and improving students' soft skills. Qualitatively, project-based learning methods, active student participation in learning, and a flexible curriculum are important components supporting this integration. So, based on this, the research results examined by researchers consistently show that if the KKNI SN-Dikti curriculum and the Independent Learning Curriculum are integrated with a needs-based learning approach (OBE), it will positively impact student learning in higher education. This finding is in line with several previous studies which show that the OBE approach can improve the quality of learning and make the curriculum relevant to the needs of the world of work (Risna, 2023; Rosidah et al., 2021; Marisana et al., 2023).

Previous research has provided a strong foundation for the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) approach to curriculum design. OBE theory emphasizes the importance of determining desired learning outcomes and designing learning experiences to achieve those outcomes. The findings that researchers have found in this research are consistent with previous research, which shows that the OBE approach can increase the relevance of the curriculum to the needs of the world of work and encourage active and researcher-oriented learning. However, it should be noted that some studies also highlight problems and criticisms of the OBE approach.

According to Muzakir (2023), factors that influence the success of curriculum implementation through the Outcome Based Education (OBE) approach in the Higher Education System include learning methods. According to the author, several learning methods could be solutions or innovations in learning: a). Enable student discussion spaces outside the classroom. b). Modern learning with video-based learning. c). Multidisciplinary science, which in this modern era, if you only use intradisciplinary science, is faced with various areas for improvement that arise from understanding that scientific discipline alone without understanding other scientific disciplines to complement the scientific disciplines that are understood. Second, academic freedom to develop science and technology can be achieved through study, research, and dissemination of knowledge through discussion seminars held by fellow academics and the wider community to increase the intellectual level of the Indonesian nation. Third, the engagement of lecturers and students. Lecturers must understand the concept of OBE because the curriculum is seen from the needs of graduates when they work after graduating, and universities must develop curricula according to the demands of the current world of work. Meanwhile, student participation in learning is crucial to creating active, creative, and innovative learning.

The challenges for teachers or lecturers in implementing OBE in vocational education include four main challenges, namely: 1) Lecturer workload; 2) Poor curriculum delivery; 3) Unstable implementation system; and 4) lack of administrator support (Damit et al., 2021). The main problem with implementing outcomes-based education is the broad definition of outcomes-based education itself (Rajaei et al., 2013). Understanding how to design results-based education (OBE) begins with how far a lecturer can design the stages of its preparation. There are 12 challenges to implementing OBE, namely 1) challenges to accepting OBE; 2) paradigm shift; 3) maintaining the quality of education; 4) restructuring assessment results and techniques; 5) OBE

as a top priority; 6) design down approach; 7) impact on students with special needs; 8) the role of the teacher; 9) learning responsibility; 10) break typecast; 11) wave of opposition; and 12) student and teacher perceptions.

Many studies show that the OBE approach is effective in higher education, but several problems may arise when implementing it. Previous research shows that determining and measuring appropriate learning outcomes and low lecturer involvement can be barriers to implementing an OBE approach. However, the findings produced by researchers show that, with the right support from teaching staff and institutional management, the integration of the KKNI SN-Dikti and *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* with the OBE approach can solve this problem. By combining the principles of the KKNI SN-Dikti and *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar*, our research increases understanding of curriculum integration in higher education. These findings align with OBE theory, which emphasizes determining desired learning outcomes and designing appropriate learning experiences (Biggs et al., 2022). However, our research also emphasizes the importance of considering context and needs.

## CONCLUSION

The integration of the KKNI SN-Dikti curriculum and the *Kurikulum Merdeka Belajar* with the OBE approach has positively impacted student learning in higher education, with a significant increase in the achievement of learning outcomes and the development of soft skills. This research recommends further exploring this integration by adopting a more holistic OBE approach, involving industry stakeholders in the curriculum development process, and evaluating the direct impact on student learning achievement and work readiness. By conducting more in-depth research, we can strengthen our understanding of this integration and make a real contribution to developing a higher education curriculum relevant to the needs of the times and society.

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