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**Academic research as an optional final assignment:  
Legal analysis and educational consequences**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article aims to evaluate the concept and implementation of government policy, making academic writing a mandatory final assignment option for students. The evaluation focuses on related laws and regulations, especially the Ministerial Regulation issued by the government since 2023. Therefore, this study is relevant by describing the policy, which has been in effect for almost a year. The policy is within the authority of the central government and relevant ministers. Apart from that, the policy is in line with one of the principles of higher education in an effort to keep up with changes and developments over time. However, some provisions are not in sync with the Ministerial Regulation, which forms the legal basis for implementing the policy. Apart from that, the policy deviates from the concept of education and higher education and existing laws and regulations which regulate education and higher education. This research is normative research from a legal perspective and covers the field of education. This research technique was carried out by means of a literature review, which analysed regulations, theories, and expert opinions from a legal and educational perspective.

**Keywords:** final assignment, academic writing, legal policy, higher education, right to education

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**INTRODUCTION**

Higher education in Indonesia is implemented based on the National Standard of Higher Education (Standar Nasional Pendidikan Tinggi or SN Dikti), as stated in Article 52 paragraph (3) of Law Number 12 of 2012 on Higher Education and the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation Number 53 of 2023 on Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The regulation has been in effect since promulgated on 18 August 2023.

Related to the authority based on law, SN Dikti is technically arranged by the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which handles the national education sector and oversees the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, unofficially called Kemendikbud).

SN Dikti is part of the Policy of Freedom of Learning Independent Campus (Merdeka Belajar - Kampus Merdeka or MBKM). Through this policy, the government wants to provide more freedom for universities to carry out their Tridharma obligations through learning, research, and community service. The obligations are set in Article 1, paragraph (9) of the Higher Education Law. By giving more privileges, the government hopes that college graduates will be able to respond to a variety of issues in accordance with contemporary demands and advancements (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020). This has implications for SN Dikti's implementation of all regulated regulations, including those pertaining to final assignments for students across Indonesia. The government has made a breakthrough regarding the issue. The final assignment for each undergraduate, master's, and doctoral level can be in the form of academic writing, prototypes, projects, or other similar forms of final assignments, as arranged in Article

18 paragraph (9), Article 19 paragraph (2), and Article 20 paragraph (3) of Ministerial Regulation 53/2023. This differs from the previous regulations, which only applied academic writing as a final assignment for students about to graduate, which was previously appointed in Article 48, paragraph (4) Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 3 of 2020 on National Standard of Higher Education. This policy allows universities to implement final assignments for students with various options.

The policy then gave rise to various reactions in higher education. Some well-known universities have welcomed and implemented the policy. Some universities are even said to have implemented final assignments other than academic writing before issuing Ministerial Regulation 53/2023. At the same time, some parties criticise the policy.

The various responses from the academic community need to be understood, and it is logical that they implement and are directly affected by the policy in the academic world. There are pros and cons regarding the government policy, which provides flexibility for students 'non-mini thesis pathway, at least illustrating how important and strategic SN Dikti is in implementing higher education. Through this article, the authors want to analyse the consequences of the policy, making academic writing one of the final assignment options for students from a legal perspective and the world of academic education.

## **METHOD**

This research is classified as legal research related to the education sector. Using the library and other required resources, the writers examine positive laws that are pertinent to problem-solving in the discussion section. This research uses a normative legal approach, also known as normative juridical. With such an approach, this research relies heavily on researchers' conceptions of positive law and related fields.

Soetandyo, as quoted in Wignjosoebroto (2002), illustrates that the concept of law is not just about norms or legal rules in the form of written statutory regulations. The concept also includes principles, theories, and norms that society follows or complies with. In this case, expert views are worth paying attention to and considering. In this article, the authors will examine legal norms or rules based on laws and regulations (positive or previous) related to education and higher education. The regulations in question are related laws, government regulations, and ministerial regulations. Apart from the national scale regulations referred to, the authors also examine the written policies of various universities implementing the government policy, including regulations, decisions, and guidelines that can be obtained.

Secondary legal materials, such as books, journals, papers, and other scientific works, can also explain primary legal materials. The data collection technique in this research uses a literature study or literature review. The authors analyse reading sources of a scientific theoretical nature, such as books and articles in accredited scientific journals, and present articles or statements at forums. Then, the analytical method used is qualitative, namely a research method that produces analytical descriptive data because it does not use formulas and numbers using deductive thinking methods. The deductive method is a way of thinking that starts from a general proposition whose truth is already known and ends in new, specific knowledge.

This research has its novelty, considering that the topic of academic research as a final, optional project has not yet received adequate attention. Moreover, the subject matter in question has never been the subject of any research that combines interdisciplinary studies from an educational perspective with a legal perspective. Thus, it is hoped that this article will serve as an example and research guide for analysing topics related to higher education.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Findings**

Education in Indonesia is generally regulated based on laws and regulations. The Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia 1945 (Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia Tahun 1945), as a written constitution (Eddyono, 2016), specifically mandates the implementation of education in Indonesia. Making the nation's life intelligent is one of the goals

of establishing the country, as stated in Paragraph IV of the Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia 1945.

Two mandate provisions for the government follow the mandate in the constitution's preamble. The two mandates referred to are the obligation for the government to organise a national education system in order to make the nation's life more intelligent, as well as to advance science and technology for the advancement of civilisation and the welfare of mankind. As stated in Article 31, Paragraph (3) and Paragraph (5) of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia 1945, those mandates affirm that education matters for humanity issues around the world, especially for all Indonesian citizens.

Matters mandated in the constitution regarding education are further regulated in laws and statutory regulations under laws, which are classified under Article 7 paragraph (1) of Law Number 12, 2011 on the Formation of Legislative Regulations. Education is generally regulated in Law Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System. The law defines national education, based on Pancasila as ideology and the constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, as an education characterised by, among other things, being responsive to the demands of changing times, based on Article 1 Paragraph 2 of the National Education System Law.

Article 26 of the law describes three educational pathways: formal education, non-formal education, and informal education. The existence of these three educational pathways, apart from developing the potential of everyone according to their level, can also complement each other and enrich the experience for students as learners. Furthermore, the law further regulates that formal education is a structured educational pathway with levels consisting of basic education, secondary education, and higher education. Each form has different arrangements and delivery systems. These things are defined in several numbers in Article 1 of the law.

#### ***National standard of higher education and government responsibility (Rules)***

The implementation of higher education as a form of formal education is specifically regulated in Law Number 12 of 2012 on Higher Education. The levels of higher education include undergraduate programs, master's programs, and doctoral programs, organised by universities, classified in Article 1 number 2 of the Higher Education Law. Article 20, paragraph (2) of the law states that all higher education administrators must implement Tridharma by providing education, research, and community service.

Based on the constitution and laws, implementing education is the government's responsibility. Accordingly, as stated in Article 58 paragraph (2) of the Formation of Legislative Regulations Law, the government has the power to enact laws and regulations, including those regarding education, as specified in Article 4 of Presidential Regulation Number 62 of 2021 on Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. As an implementing derivative of the Higher Education Law, Government Regulation Number 4 of 2014 on Implementation of Higher Education and Management of College may be issued by the government based on its authority in education.

The current regulation governs the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology's duties, responsibilities, and authority in managing higher education. According to Article 7, paragraphs (2) and (3) of the Higher Education Law and Article 3 of the Government Regulation on Implementation of Higher Education and Management of College, the Minister's responsibilities include planning, regulating, supervising, monitoring, and evaluating higher education providers as well as advising and coordinating them.

One form of regulation by the minister is the existence of SN Dikti as a national standard for higher education, which is a form of responsibility of the minister's duty to regulate the administration of higher education. The mandate of the Higher Education Law then contains further regulations in Government Regulation Number 13 of 2015 on the Second Amendment to Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005 on National Education Standards juncto (in conjunction with) Government Regulation Number 19 of 2005 on National Education Standards.

### ***MBKM and SN Dikti: Current policy and regulation***

Due to the existence of the Government Regulations in question, the government issued Ministerial Regulation 53/2023, which regulates the current standard, SN Dikti. SN Dikti is a standard concept that includes national education, research, and community service standards. It shows that SN Dikti further elaborates on the Tridharma spirit of higher education.

SN Dikti is prepared as part of the current MBKM policy, which provides more freedom for higher education institutions to design and implement innovative learning processes. By implementing this policy, universities must develop optimal, effective, efficient, and quality learning programs. This aims to ensure that students have competencies that are better prepared to respond to global issues, especially industries' needs (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020). In connection with the issuance of the Ministerial Regulation, the government has issued an MBKM guidebook, which is expected to be useful for university managers or leaders, lecturers, students, stakeholders, and other related parties (Direktorat Jenderal Pendidikan Tinggi, 2020).

Then, as a form of the current MBKM policy regulated in Ministerial Regulation 53/2023, the government makes academic research one of the optional final assignments that undergraduate, master's, and doctoral program students must complete. Meanwhile, academic writing is included in research standards. Therefore, academic writing must fulfil research standards.

Research standards consist of output, process, and input standards regulated by Ministerial Regulation 53/2023. Research output standards must require the results' quality, relevance, usefulness, and openness. Research process standards cover minimum criteria for planning and monitoring research activities. Meanwhile, research input standards regulate, among other things, access to infrastructure and lecturer assignments, as stated in Article 53, Article 54, and Article 57 of Ministerial Regulation 53/2023.

These three research standards are mandated to be in line with and able to support the fulfilment of the higher education's vision and mission, as mandated by each research standard provision. Various research standard criteria must be met by universities, study programs, and every lecturer, as mandated in Article 4, paragraph (1), paragraph (2), and paragraph (3) of Ministerial Regulation 53/2023. The authors understand that the provisions for research standards reflect the freedom of the academic forum as one of the characteristics of the world of higher education, as mandated by the Higher Education Law.

According to Article 9, paragraphs (2) and (3) of the Higher Education Law, freedom of the academic platform refers to the right of professors and/or lecturers with scientific prestige to speak freely and responsibly about a topic pertaining to a field of knowledge and its branches of knowledge. Meeting research standards is crucial for universities and lecturers to uphold the Tridharma of higher education under the guidance and policies of higher education institutions.

### ***Non-academic writing (Mechanism and implementation)***

Meanwhile, final assignments for students are included in national education standards. According to Ministerial Regulation 53/2023's Article 18 paragraph (9) undergraduate students' final assignments might take on the form of a project, prototype, or other equivalent final assignments in addition to a thesis. Undergraduate students may complete their final assignments individually or in groups, including mini-theses and other assignments more usually referred to as non-mini theses. The final assignment for students may be eliminated or not required, as stipulated in letter b, even if undergraduate (or bachelor) study programs (and maybe applied undergraduate study programs as well) have adopted a project-based curriculum or another comparable format. This is called a project-based curriculum.

Similar things also apply to theses for master's students and dissertations for doctoral students as an optional final assignment. However, the final assignment for both must still be done individually as obligated in Article 19 paragraph (2) and Article 20 paragraph (3) of Ministerial Regulation 53/2023. In addition, the MBKM Policy removes the requirement for master's and doctoral students to publish scientific papers in accredited journals or international journals as an obligation. The requirement was required in Article 66 d of Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education Regulation Number 44 of 2015 on National Standard of Higher Education

and Circular Letter of Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education Number 444/B/SE/2016 on Implementation of National Standard of Higher Education in Masters, Doctoral, and Applied Doctoral Programs.

The obligation has been eliminated since the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 3 of 2020 on the National Standard of Higher Education was issued as a Ministerial Regulation early in the implementation of the MBKM policy and later repealed by Ministerial Regulation 53/2023. With Ministerial Regulation 53/2023 issuance, higher education leaders must adapt within two years after the issuance, as provided in Article 104 a of Ministerial Regulation 53/2023. This means the government allows universities to change their curriculum implementation following Ministerial Regulation 53/2023.

In particular, the government provides choices for universities to apply freedom in the form of final assignments other than in the form of academic writing. The implementation depends on the policies of each university, as previously explained, with examples of its implementation in several universities mentioned in the following explanation. In implementing the government policy, each university and study program issues written policies as an internal legal basis to follow up and regulate the technical implementation. Likewise, universities are free to continue to make academic writing a final assignment for students without implementing the government policy. In other words, applying academic research as a final assignment for students can still be implemented according to the policies of each study program and university. The authors' notes contain documented policies from a number of universities that have applied government policy by providing students with alternatives to academic writing for their final assignments. These written policies are regulations and decisions from state and private universities. In this case, the written policies of each university demonstrate good governance and transparency.

#### *Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta*

Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, or UNY, is one of the Legal Entity Higher Education Institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Negeri Badan Hukum) in Indonesia, based on Government Regulation Number 53 of 2022 on Legal Entity State University of Yogyakarta. UNY implements the government policy. Article 11, paragraph (1) and paragraph (2) of the Rector of Yogyakarta State University Regulation Number 15 of 2023 on Yogyakarta State University Academic Regulations makes academic research an optional final assignment for undergraduate study program students. The final assignment options are in the form of a mini-thesis final assignment, a non-mini thesis final assignment, or a final work of art assignment. Even applied undergraduate program students are specially required to complete a final assignment as a final project.

Final assignment provisions for undergraduate program students differ from those for master's and doctoral study program students. UNY requires academic writing in the form of a thesis for a master's and a dissertation for a doctoral degree. However, there is an exception to the provisions for students' special program of master's Towards Doctoral Education for Superior Undergraduates (Pendidikan Magister menuju Doktor untuk Sarjana Unggul or PMDSU) (Tim Beasiswa PMDSU, 2023: 1-4), where the final assignment does not have to be in the form of a thesis (Article 11 paragraph (3) and paragraph (4) of the Rector's Regulation). UNY is taking advantage of this government policy, especially for undergraduate students and limited to special master's students. In addition, the Rector Regulation is contained in the 2023 Yogyakarta State University Academic Regulation Book, which can be accessed publicly.

#### *Padjadjaran University*

Like UNY, Padjadjaran University (Universitas Padjadjaran or UNPAD) does not require undergraduate study program students to complete a mini-thesis. The university has special provisions to meet the need, as regulated in Rector's Regulation Number 46 of 2016 on the Implementation of Education in Padjadjaran University.

The Rector's Regulation states that the obligation to complete a mini thesis for students can be replaced with another assignment in the form of scientific articles in a reputable international journal or an accredited national journal. Regarding this assignment, it is required that the student be the main author and the supervisor be the co-author, as well as including the university

institution. It is understood that Padjadjaran University still requires undergraduate study program students to do academic writing as a final assignment, but this can be in the form of a thesis or journal article.

#### *Sebelas Maret University*

Sebelas Maret University (Universitas Sebelas Maret or UNS) also takes advantage of the government policy. This can be seen from the Rector's Decree Number 787/UN27/HK/2019 on Academic Awards for Intellectual Activities for Sebelas Maret University Students. The internal decree was in effect before Ministerial Regulation 53/2023 was issued.

The Rector's decision allows undergraduate study program students to work on final projects other than mini-thesis. The obligation to work on the thesis can be replaced through recognition access. One of them is that the students do not need to take a mini-thesis exam if they pass the National Student Scientific Week competition (Pekan Ilmiah Mahasiswa Nasional or PIMNAS), either as finalists or medallists. PIMNAS activities are a series of stages for evaluating proposals for the Student Creativity Program (Program Kreativitas Mahasiswa or PKM). This program is a series of the MBKM policy (Afriyudianto, 2023).

#### *Muhammadiyah University of Magelang*

Apart from state universities, private universities take advantage of government policy. One is the Muhammadiyah University of Magelang (Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang or UNIMMA), under the auspices of Muhammadiyah, an Islamic organisation based in Indonesia. UNIMMA issued Rector's Regulation Number 010/PER/II.3.AU/F/2017 on Academic Awards for Student Achievement and Activities at Muhammadiyah University of Magelang.

Undergraduate study program students can be freed from the obligation to do a mini-thesis by having an equalisation by the Rector's Regulation. This equalisation can be done if the student has completed certain activities. These activities include, among other things, the student becoming the main writer of an accredited national journal three times, a national conference speaker at least three times, or the best speaker at an international seminar at least once in terms of academic writing and scientific output. Apart from that, equalization can be achieved if the student becomes the chairman or implementing member of PKM for certain categories, the champion of a science competition at least at a national level, or a winner or finalist for outstanding students at a national level.

#### *Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi*

Universitas Muhammadiyah Kotabumi, also known as the Muhammadiyah University of Kotabumi, is another Muhammadiyah-affiliated university that is taking advantage of the government policy. In order to support the timely graduation of undergraduate programs, UMKO issued Rector's Decree Number 378/PRN/II.3.AU/F/2022 on the Implementation of the Freedom of Learning Independent Campus. The Chancellor's Decree states that the final assignment, a mini-thesis, for undergraduate study program students will be waived if the student has a nationally accredited journal publication at least at the SINTA 3 level. In addition, the students can replace their final thesis assignment by creating a scientific, technological, or literary work published in the national journal at the SINTA 3 level.

SINTA (Science and Technology Index) is a journal ranking portal that applies in Indonesia as a series of Scientific Journal Accreditation (Akreditasi Jurnal Nasional or ARJUNA). It is regulated in Article 6 of Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education Regulation Number 9 of 2018 on Scientific Journal Accreditation. With the application of the Tridharma of Higher Education, one of SINTA's roles is to evaluate lecturer performance (Saputra, 2020). For example, publications that use the Scopus index will automatically be placed in the top category, SINTA 1, regarding research criteria.

## **Discussion**

Based on the explanations, it is clear that the government has the power to control how education is implemented in Indonesia in accordance with the laws and rules that are currently in

use. Therefore, the government also has the authority to issue policies and regulations in the education sector. This can be seen in the MBKM policy and Ministerial Regulation 53/2023.

However, some things need to be criticised about the Ministerial Regulation 53/2023 regulations, which have consequences for SN Dikti and other related things. Higher education institutions must provide a two-year adjustment provision, meaning the non-mini thesis requirement is also required. The provision regarding optional final assignments other than academic research is a permissibility to apply. This is different if it is determined that certain or all provisions will come into effect two years after promulgation. In addition, the provisions are not followed by the administrative sanction. In other words, there is a lack of synchronisation between the provisions in Ministerial Regulation 53/2023 itself.

The choice not to implement the policy is in line with the Minister's statement during the socialisation of Ministerial Regulation 53/2023. At the same time, only some universities implement the policy. The fact shows that not all universities can implement the policy, which can impact the quality of graduates.

Moreover, according to Ministerial Decree 53/2023, the option of academic writing as a final assignment undermines research standards for students. In fact, universities and lecturers are required to apply research standards to their students who will graduate from college (Article 55 paragraph (1) juncto Article 4 paragraph (1) of Minister Regulation 53/2023). This provision was followed by another provision, which stated that the implementation of research standards for students was carried out together with the lecturer or with the guidance of the lecturer (Article 56 paragraph (1) and paragraph (2) of Minister Regulation 53/2023). This means that universities and lecturers must apply research standards to students.

The implementation of research for students is carried out under scientific principles and methods, as well as scientific autonomy and academic culture (Article 55 paragraph (2) of Minister Regulation 53/2023). This is in line with the understanding of research following the Higher Education Law, which aims to obtain information, data, and information relating to the understanding and/or testing of a branch of science and technology (Article 1 number 10 of the Higher Education Law). In addition, there is no further explanation in the law or ministerial regulations regarding scientific principles and methods.

These are also in line with the Higher Education Law, which mandates the implementation of scientific autonomy in higher education as one of its characteristics. Scientific autonomy is the freedom to discover, develop, express, and uphold scientific truth in a field of science and technology in accordance with academic culture and scientific principles and methods (Article 9 paragraph (3) of the Higher Education Law). Academic culture is a system of values, ideas, norms, actions, and works originating from science and technology (Napitupulu, 2012).

Apart from scientific autonomy, academic freedom is one of the characteristics of higher education that emphasises the importance of academic culture. Academic freedom is exploring and developing science and technology (Article 9, paragraph (1) of the Higher Education Law). This means that with the academic freedom provided, it is hoped that universities can develop an academic culture for the academic community, including students.

The Higher Education Law mandates that the academic community have a scientific tradition and be responsible for implementing academic life. This needs to be done by developing an academic culture. The academic community's responsibilities are carried out through learning and/or scientific research, which must be protected and facilitated by higher education leaders (Article 8 paragraph (1), paragraph (2), and paragraph (3) of the Higher Education Law). It can be understood that there is an interaction or reciprocal aspect of rights and obligations in academic administration, both for university leaders and the academic community.

According to the Higher Education Law and the National Education System Law, higher education differs from other types of formal education, as demonstrated by several characteristics that characterise the ideal academic life. This ideal is not reflected in government policy, leading to legal conflicts. The legal conflicts are meant either by conflicts between provinces in Ministerial Regulation 53/2023 or conflicting provisions between Ministerial Regulation 53/2023 and higher regulations.

In general, education can be understood as a method that humans use to make changes by understanding things and developing abilities, habits, and attitudes. In line with this understanding, John Locke put forward several educational goals related to the philosophy of science (Edwards, 1967). These goals include achieving everyone's intelligence by mastering knowledge according to the level (Tarcov, 1969) and providing the basic characteristics of human needs to become mature and responsible individuals (Yolton, 1968).

Those are in line with the understanding that education aims to develop or change a person's cognition, affection, and communication (D. Saputra et.al., 2024). Education also aims to enable learners to become good citizens (Roosevelt, 1930), based on a theory whose validity has been tested and one's experience. Essentially, this explanation demonstrates that education seeks to help all people in accordance with their respective fields of expertise. Apart from that, this shows the close relationship between education and civics.

The theory and comprehension understanding of education and its urgency are then embodied in the National Education System and Higher Education Law. In this case, especially regarding higher education, the characteristics of the world of higher education are full of scientific knowledge. In general, the National Education System Law states that education is defined as a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and learning process so that students actively develop their potential. To realise this, there is an educational component to achieve national education goals (Article 1 number 1 and number 3 of the National Education System Law), namely educating the nation's life, which is one of the state's goals. Furthermore, the concept of higher education being developed in Indonesia can be seen in general from the explanations provided by the Higher Education Law. It is stated that higher education aims to develop student potential, produce competent graduates, produce science and technology for the benefit of the nation and its civilisation, as well as create general welfare and make the life of the nation intelligent (Article 5 of the Higher Education Law), as stated in Paragraph IV of the Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia of 1945.

In line with this, the Higher Education Law states that higher education has principles that include the search for scientific truth and upholding human rights. It is also stated that there are principles in the administration of higher education, including the principles of honesty, justice, benefits, benevolence, and responsibility (Article 6 and Article 11 of the Higher Education Law). This means that the goals and principles of higher education are in line with the national education concept and the educational theory. Furthermore, these things can be understood as a reflection of what higher education should be.

The Higher Education Law then mandates universities to conduct education, research, and community service. The obligations of universities are called the Tridharma of Higher Education (Article 1 number 9 of the Higher Education Law). As a form of implementing the Tridharma, research standards must be implemented by universities and lecturers, including implementation for students, as previously explained. In its implementation for students, research that is full of scientific knowledge should be realised by having a final assignment in the form of academic writing.

The academic writing is urgent for students because the research is measurable. Unfortunately, this urgency is not in Ministerial Regulation 53/2023. It is stated that Article 55 mandates universities and lecturers to educate students through conducting research. These provisions are degraded by the provisions of Article 18 paragraph (9), Article 19 paragraph (2), and Article 20 paragraph (3). Each of these provisions states that the final assignment for students in undergraduate programs, master's programs, and doctoral programs is not required to be in the form of academic writing. Moreover, Article 18, paragraph (9) states that final assignments for undergraduate students can be carried out individually or in groups.

Besides, the Higher Education Law mandates that university students who will later become graduates are required to have scientific reasoning. This applies to final-year students of undergraduate programs, master's programs, and doctoral programs. Furthermore, postgraduate students in both programs must contribute to scientific research. The legal facts show that this policy contradicts the Higher Education Law.



On the other hand, Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 3 of 2020 on the National Standard of Higher Education, which was in effect previously, still makes academic writing the final assignment for students. Ministerial Regulation 3/2020 is the first regulation to be implemented since the MBKM Policy came into force. In this case, the author wants to compare the law with previous regulations to analyse and criticise Ministerial Regulation 53/2023.

Ministerial Regulation 3/2020, as an initial illustration of the implementation of the MBKM Policy, included a final assignment in the form of academic writing (Article 48 paragraph (4)), with no other option, which means it is an obligation. Each obligation in the form of a mini-thesis, thesis, or dissertation applies to final-year students, whether in undergraduate, master's, or doctoral programs. Ministerial Regulation 3/2020 shows that the MBKM Policy could be implemented following the Higher Education Law's mandate in conducting research for students.

The obligations of lecturers as educators towards their (university) students are like the demands of teachers as educators towards their students. As professional educators, teachers have main tasks guided by The National Education Standards Agency (Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan or BSNP). The tasks formulate professional competencies such as mastering educational learning theories and principles and the structure of material concepts and scientific thinking patterns that support the subjects taught (Pranowo et.al., 2023: 816) for students. This shows how important the competence of an educator is, which influences the performance of a good educator. This means that lecturers' obligations as educators cannot be reduced, including their obligations to educate their students in carrying out academic research as a final assignment.

Other problems regarding research standards can be found. Ministerial Regulation 53/2023 regulates that research standards consist of output (result and benefit), process, and input. In this case, the input aspect is included in the standard research process. Meanwhile, research input standards are more aimed at arranging facilities and infrastructure, as well as matters of an administrative nature and those that support the implementation of research (Article 52 to Article 57).

According to Ministerial Regulation 3/2020, these research standards differ from research standards, which include results, content, process, assessment, researchers, and other supporting matters (Article 45 to Article 55). This shows the urgency regarding input, process, and output and the positive impact of carrying out research. The past provisions differ from the current provisions, which are more concerned with outputs only by including input matters in the standard research process.

Research standards have become an urgent issue, including for students. This is because research standards indicate that research has certain measurements and standards, including guidance from lecturers as an obligation. This is in line with the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs that are included in academic education. These study programs are different from vocational education and professional education. Furthermore, these things show that research standards for students should be implemented while making academic writing the final assignment for students.

The government policy reflects vocational education, which differs from undergraduate, master's, and doctoral study programs. In this case, as a requirement, the Teaching Factory (TEFA) Learning Model reflects vocational education, especially in the current situation. In essence, the method requires vocational education providers to ensure that their students have the relevant job qualifications required by the current industries, or what is known as graduate work readiness (GWR) (Rosidah & Sutirman, 2023). It shows that the implementation of vocational education is required to ensure that the graduates can face industrial issues rapidly flourishing in technology. This demand is certainly different from undergraduate, master's, and doctoral study programs required to develop science and knowledge.

The current MBKM policy makes academic writing one of the final assignment options and makes student measurement standards biased. The Graduate Competency Standards (Standar Kompetensi Lulusan or SKL) as a reference is a part of the national education standards, which are separate from research standards. This means that the MBKM policy has now lowered student

standards by eliminating the implementation of research for students and referring only to SKL, which focuses only on learning.

Implementing Tridharma with this policy deviates from the philosophical meaning of Tridharma and the laws. Amid these problems, all universities are required to comply with SN Dikti as a form of government policy. The government seems to have given little thought to the readiness of various universities to implement the policy. Only a few universities have implemented this policy. It is feared that this will negatively impact not only college graduates but also universities and the academic world.

The government should make a breakthrough in draughting higher education concepts and standards, along with their implementation, without deviating from the concept of education and the mandate of the Higher Education Law. This government obligation must be carried out by strengthening the characteristics of the academic world of higher education as reflected in the Tridharma of Higher Education. According to Article 4, paragraphs (1) and (2) of Minister Regulation 53/2023, higher education institutions must implement the Tridharma of Higher Education based on national, research, and community service standards as an inseparable unit.

Furthermore, the explanations imply that student education ought to benefit society through service and being scientific—which is achieved through research. These align with the concept of higher education, especially in efforts to solve problems regarding the administration of higher education and the quality of its graduates.

In this case, the problem of reforming higher education in a broad sense is how higher education itself can reach and meet society's needs. The reform, both in the technical sense and in the broad sense, must be carried out by reflecting a change in a person's attitude towards the problem (attitudinal problem) (Najmudin, 2012: 92). Linked to the concept of education and higher education, as well as mandates mentioned in the Higher Education Law and the National Education System Law, it can be understood that the implementation of higher education must be able to encourage students to have character and contribute to society by fulfilling the implementation of education and research.

Meanwhile, the challenges of providing higher education are faced with the reality of the rapid development of globalisation. This challenge is in line with a dictum, "het recht hinkt achter de feiten aan", meaning that the law slips behind societal events. As if to follow global trends, the world of education, especially higher education, is increasingly lagging, along with the fading of the unique characteristics of higher education.

Government policy in education (or politics in education) is an elaboration and tradition of values and a system of conceptions of the nation's character. Politics determines the development of a country, where the quality of the education system cannot be separated from determining the quality of its people's skills. Furthermore, politics determines national sovereignty in shaping humans today and in the future (Kartono, 1997). Moreover, Diane Orenlichter states that a state's lack of protection and fulfilment of human rights within its territory shows that it is not sovereign (Triyana, 2023). Asshiddiqie's quote also includes the right to education for its citizens as part of human and constitutional rights (Ulum & Farizi, 2009).

It is not an exaggeration to say that education must be the main priority or path that must be taken by this nation to become a dignified nation and able to compete in the wider arena of life (Bastian, 2002: 39). Therefore, the government's success in improving and renewing the education sector will determine the success of this nation in being able to survive the challenges of the future. Furthermore, there must be an initiative from the government, in this case, the president and minister in the education sector, to be able to make improvements and changes towards a better direction. On the other hand, it would be very dangerous if the president and relevant minister continued to understand and use academic freedom, freedom of academic platforms, and scientific autonomy as a form of liberalisation and commercialisation of education in each of their policies. Government policy should bring a paradigm that is following the essence of education.

### ***Curriculum freedom solution***

In this case, through the MBKM Policy, the government should give every university the freedom to determine its curriculum to adapt to current developments and comply with the mandate of the Higher Education Law. The freedom in question should strengthen the university curriculum that characterises the academic world, not the opposite, which is happening. This is important, considering that the curriculum is a feature that differentiates it from other formal education.

In general, formal education has an orderly and systematic delivery system, with a systematic teaching method according to the applicable curriculum. The term curriculum comes from the words *curir* (runner) and *curere* (race place), which was originally used in the world of sports to mean the distance a runner must cover from start to finish to get a medal. Then, this understanding is applied to the world of formal education in several subjects that must be taken by a student from the beginning to the end of the learning program to obtain a diploma (Ruhimat, 2011: 2). The existence of a curriculum shows that formal education has its system, both programmed and scheduled based on constitutional mandates and a law, which makes it different from informal education and non-formal education.

The term curriculum is not only limited to several subjects but also includes all learning experiences that influence the personal development of students as learners. Harold B. Albery views the curriculum as all of the activities that are provided for the students by the school. Thus, the curriculum should not be limited to activities in the classroom but also include activities carried out by students outside the classroom.

The opinion is in line with what Saylor, Alexander, and Lewis expressed. They consider the curriculum as all the school's efforts to influence students to learn, both in the classroom, in the yard, and outside the school (Ruhimat, 2011: 2). Robert S. Zais proposed four foundations for curriculum development, namely philosophy and the nature of knowledge, society and culture, the individual, and learning theory (Zais, 1976).

Concerning the implementation of higher education, it can be understood that the curriculum does not just emphasise the implementation of limited courses in the classroom but also ensures that students as learners can study and develop their abilities through various activities outside the classroom. It can also be understood that higher education must be able to encourage students not only to focus on textbooks or in the classroom or building but also to gain guidance from outside the classroom and do good deeds from the knowledge gained to be useful for society.

In addition, rather than making academic research a requirement, the government should control and guarantee that students' final assignments can offer a topic that fits their interests and skill levels. Similar to in-class instruction, students' motivation to actively participate in class will be significantly influenced by their level of interest in a topic or subject (Suratno et al., 2023). Clearly, students' enthusiasm for a subject greatly impacts how well they learn it. At the same time, this can be used as a strategy to motivate students to complete their obligations according to their skills. Connected to the problem of academic research as a final assignment for students, successful completion of these responsibilities will depend on research topics that students find engaging. Universities must have a well-defined and organised curriculum as part of the government-mandated formal education pathway. The curriculum must not deviate from the goals of national education and the essence of the curriculum. The National Education System Law defines the curriculum as a set of plans and arrangements regarding objectives and content, as well as learning materials and methods used as guidelines for implementing learning activities to achieve certain educational goals (Article 1 number 19 of the National Education System Law). Then specifically, the Higher Education Law provides an understanding of the higher education curriculum as a set of guidelines for implementing learning activities developed by each university. Furthermore, the curriculum in each study program must refer to national higher education standards, which include the development of intellectual intelligence, noble character, and skills (Article 35, paragraph (1) and paragraph (2) of the Higher Education Law).

From the explanation above, the three scopes of curriculum development, as mandated by the laws, must be reflected in the courses and their content. These needs should be anticipated by

higher education institutions that run undergraduate and postgraduate study programs by ensuring that at least the curriculum prepared contains content that is able to strengthen academic skills. Furthermore, it requires awareness and initiative from each head of universities, faculties, and especially study programs to develop existing science, with the freedom given by the government.

Regarding reflecting on a good curriculum in higher education, perhaps we can reflect on Mochtar Kusumaatmadja's idea of clinical legal education. Through this idea, Mochtar Kusumaatmadja introduced a method for law students to be actively involved in resolving legal cases (Atmoredjo, 2023: 31). These understandings and ideas raise awareness that the higher education system should be able to accommodate the increase in skills and knowledge for students in a balanced way. Mastery of theory and knowledge is not enough for students to face and solve societal problems, especially to help and provide understanding to ordinary people. Furthermore, it is raising hope that universities, along with their students and graduates, will not only be able to answer problems in their respective countries but also have better abilities and be able to compete with other graduates from universities in various countries.

Therefore, there must be an improvement in the education system so that students can understand the theory and knowledge taught in class and produce output, practice, and implement their knowledge. By paying attention to and understanding the real problems that occur, it is hoped that the government can create a policy so that the provision of higher education is able to develop students' academic abilities and make a real contribution to society. It is hoped that various universities in Indonesia can follow up on this urgency according to their character, abilities, and conditions.

## **CONCLUSION**

Through the minister in the education sector, the government has the authority to issue regulations and policies in the administration of higher education based on statutory regulations. In this case, the government issued the MBKM Policy to ensure that universities can face global developments and challenges. One of the latest MBKM policies includes final assignments that offer options other than academic writing for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students.

Ministerial Regulation 35/2023 outlines the policy concerning higher education quality assurance. The regulation regarding the final assignment option is included in the scope of SN Dikti, which is one of the parts regulated in the regulation. Several universities have implemented this policy by issuing written regulations or decisions.

Even though the government has the authority, and several universities have implemented it, the policy regarding final assignments cannot be justified. This is because the policy violates existing rules and theories. In terms of regulations, there are legal conflicts between provisions in Ministerial Regulation 53/2023 and between Ministerial Regulation 53/2023 and the Higher Education Law and the National Education System Law.

The conflicting provisions in Ministerial Decree 53/2023 are the provisions regarding academic writing as one of the final assignments, with the provisions on research standards, Tridharma obligations of higher education, and two-year adjustments after the regulation issuance. Furthermore, there are provisions regarding research standards as one of the components of the Tridharma of higher education, which must be implemented by universities and lecturers for students. This is only possible to carry out in the form of academic writing for students who want to graduate.

Apart from that, the policy violates the mandate of the Higher Education Law regarding the concept of higher education, the obligations of the Tridharma of higher education, and the scientific nature of the academic world of higher education. Ministerial Regulation 53/2023, which makes SN Dikti included in Higher Education Quality Assurance, also violates the mandate of the Higher Education Law, which states that each is different. The incompatibility between this policy and the Higher Education Law also shows that there are deviations from educational theory. The deviation concerns the concept of higher education, which is full of scientific knowledge and is necessary for students to acquire. According to this interpretation, the Higher Education Law demonstrates how undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs differ from

other formal education and study levels. The government should issue policies and regulations regarding final assignments without eliminating the implementation of research standards for students. This was realised with Ministerial Regulation 3/2020 as the previous regulation. Meanwhile, the government can try to adapt universities to global developments by providing more freedom for universities to develop curricula. A balanced curriculum that emphasises both hard and soft skills for students is one way to achieve this.

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