

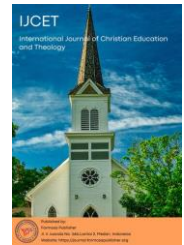


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Analysis of Permendikbud No.53 of 2023 Policy for Christian Religious Education in Indonesia

Gilbert Timothy Majesty^{1*}, Litos Sitorus Pane², Hotmaulina Sihotang³

Universitas Kristen Indonesia

Corresponding Author: Gilbert Timothy Majesty gilbert.majesty@uki.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the impact of the policy on the curriculum, teaching methods, and the integration of Christian values in higher education for theology and CRE teacher training. Using a qualitative approach through policy analysis, this research found that Permendikbud No. 53 of 2023 demands the adaptation of an Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum that aligns with the Indonesian National Qualification Framework (KKNI). On one hand, this policy strengthens the competency standards of CRE graduates, but on the other hand, it presents challenges in maintaining the theological distinctiveness and the mission of Christian character formation. This article also explores opportunities for the development of CRE through collaboration between universities and the utilization of digital technology in accordance with policy mandates.

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesia plays a strategic role not only in shaping students' character based on Christian values but also in contributing to the development of human resources with integrity and competitiveness. In the context of higher education, Christian Religious Education (CRE) is not only taught as a mandatory course in Christian universities but is also developed as a discipline that involves theological, pedagogical, and contextual approaches. (DAN, 2025) However, the development of CRE science cannot be separated from the national education policy that continues to undergo changes. One of the latest policies worth examining is the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation (Permendikbudristek) Number 53 of 2023 concerning Higher Education Standards, which regulates various aspects of higher education administration, including the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum and graduate competency standards. (Ekowati et al., 2025) This policy certainly brings significant implications for the development of Christian Religious Education, both in terms of curriculum, teaching methods, and the integration of Christian faith values in higher education systems.

Previous studies have extensively examined educational policies and their impact on religious education. For example, a study by Suryadi analyzed the impact of Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020 on Islamic religious education in public universities, concluding that the policy provided space for strengthening a competency-based curriculum. (Suryadi, 2022) Meanwhile, research by Sitanggang explores the challenges of implementing OBE in theological education in Indonesia, finding that Christian colleges still struggle to align national standards with the distinctiveness of their theological mission. (Sitanggang & Saragih, 2025) However, these studies have not specifically addressed how Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 affects the development of CRE Science, both in academic and spiritual aspects. Some other studies, such as the work of Happy Undas, focus more on CRE pedagogy

in general schools, thus not yet addressing the complexities of higher education. (Undas & Sasirais, 2024) Thus, there is a research gap that needs to be filled, particularly in examining how this latest policy interacts with the vision and mission of Christian education in Indonesia.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the implications of Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 on Christian Religious Education in Indonesia, focusing on four main aspects: the impact of the policy on the development of OBE-based CRE curriculum, challenges and opportunities in maintaining theological identity amidst national standards, adaptation strategies that can be undertaken by Christian universities, and CRE curriculum models that align with OBE. This research not only aims to map the structural changes mandated by the policy but also to explore the theological and pedagogical responses of CRE stakeholders, including lecturers, students, and churches as partner institutions. Thus, this research is expected to provide practical recommendations for policymakers in the Christian education environment, while also enriching the academic discussion on the relationship between state and religion in the context of higher education.

Novelty The research, compared to previous studies, lies in several aspects. First, this research is one of the first to specifically examine Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 in relation to CRE, while previous studies still focused on earlier regulations (such as Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020). Second, this research not only examines the normative aspects of the policy but also integrates the perspective of educational theology to assess the extent to which national policy can accommodate the uniqueness of CRE. This interdisciplinary approach, which combines public policy analysis with practical theology, has not been widely adopted in similar research. (Rahman, 2025) Third, this research involves the voices of various stakeholders (lecturers, students, churches) to provide a holistic picture of the policy impact at the micro level. This is different from several previous studies that tend to focus on document analysis without field immersion.

In addition, this research also offers practical contributions by formulating a model for adapting the CRE curriculum that aligns with OBE while maintaining theological integrity. This model can serve as a reference for Christian colleges in responding to policy demands without sacrificing the mission of Christian character formation. In a broader academic context, the findings of this research can enrich the field of religious education, particularly in the dialogue between state policy and faith-based education. Thus, this research is not only relevant for academics and practitioners of Religious Education but also for education policymakers who need to consider the religious dimension in regulatory formulation.

As a conclusion to the introduction, it is important to emphasize that the dynamics of national education policy and the development of Religious Education are two interrelated matters. Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023, with all its complexities, should be understood not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity for creative reform in religious education. This research is expected to serve as a starting point for a more in-depth study on the future of inclusive, quality religious education in Indonesia that remains rooted in the faith values of each tradition.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative approach with policy analysis methods to deeply examine the implications of Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 on the development of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesia. The qualitative approach was chosen due to the nature of the research, which aims to understand the complexity of educational policy phenomena within specific social and theological contexts, where numbers and statistics are insufficient to capture the nuances of the issues. (Hasanah, 2021) This research not only focuses on the written policy text but also on how the policy is interpreted, adapted, and implemented by key actors in the Christian higher education environment.

As a policy analysis study, this research follows the framework developed by Hogwood and Gunn (1984), which encompasses three main dimensions: context, content, and process. (Hill, 2014) First, a context analysis is conducted to understand the political, socio-cultural, and educational background that underlies the issuance of Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023. This stage involves the study of supporting documents such as the National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), previous higher education policies, and literature on global higher education challenges. (Anggraena et al., 2022) Second, content analysis focuses on the systematic examination of regulatory texts to identify articles relevant to CRE, such as provisions on Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curricula, graduate competency standards, and university autonomy. Third, process analysis is conducted to explore how this policy is implemented at the institutional level, including the obstacles and supporting factors that emerge in the adoption process of the policy by Christian universities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Policy on the Development of Obe-Based Cre Curriculum

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesia is currently facing both challenges and significant opportunities with the implementation of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum through Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023. This policy marks a paradigm shift in higher education from a content-based approach to a competency-based approach, which significantly impacts the development of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) curriculum in various Christian universities. Conceptually, the OBE approach emphasizes the learning outcomes that students must master after completing a study program. (Muzakir, 2023) In the context of CRE, this means that the curriculum must be designed to produce graduates who not only master theological knowledge but are also able to apply Christian values in various life contexts. This shift demands a profound transformation in curriculum design, teaching methods, and evaluation systems.

This government policy actually provides a great opportunity for enhancing the relevance of CRE in the contemporary era. With the OBE approach, Christian educational institutions are encouraged to pay more attention to the real needs of society and the church. The CRE curriculum can be designed to address current challenges such as moral crises, religious pluralism, and social changes, while still adhering to a strong theological foundation. (Simamora, Tambunan, Bancin, & Lumbanraja, 2025) However, the implementation of OBE in CRE is not without various serious challenges. One of the main challenges is maintaining theological distinctiveness while meeting national competency standards. Many CRE lecturers are concerned that this outcome-based approach will reduce the depth of theological studies and replace it with a focus solely on practical skills. This concern primarily arises because the characteristics of CRE are essentially formative and transformative.

On the other hand, this policy could actually serve as a momentum to revitalize the CRE curriculum. The OBE approach allows for the development of more creative and contextual learning methods. For example, through project-based learning, students can directly apply Christian principles in solving social problems. Thus, CRE not only becomes theoretical knowledge but also a real-life practice. Another technical challenge faced is the readiness of human resources. Many CRE lecturers who are accustomed to traditional teaching methods need to adapt to this new approach. Intensive training and mentoring have become urgent needs so that educators can design learning in accordance with OBE principles without sacrificing the depth of the material.

At the institutional level, Christian universities need to establish a comprehensive quality assurance system. (Herindrasti, 2019) This system must be able to ensure that all learning outcomes are truly achieved, while also maintaining the Christian identity that is the hallmark of the institution. Collaboration among Christian universities becomes important for sharing experiences and resources. An interesting aspect of this policy is that it provides space for the development of contextual curricula. Each institution

can adjust the CRE curriculum to meet the specific needs of its region, as long as it still meets national standards. This flexibility allows CRE to develop creatively without losing its theological essence.

The government has actually provided fairly clear guidelines for the implementation of OBE. However, careful interpretation by Christian education administrators is needed to ensure that this policy is not applied rigidly. Christian principles regarding character formation and spirituality must remain the main focus in every formulated learning outcome. In a broader perspective, the OBE-based CRE curriculum development policy aligns with the church and society's need for Christian leaders who not only understand theology but also possess practical competencies. CRE graduates are expected to meet the challenges of the times with integrity and adequate capacity.

Evaluation of the implementation of this policy needs to be conducted periodically. There needs to be a mechanism to assess the extent to which the OBE approach truly enhances the quality of CRE without eroding its theological distinctiveness. Input from various stakeholders, including the church and the community, must be an important consideration in the refinement of the curriculum. (Stuart-Buttle, 2019) For the world of Christian education, this policy should not be seen as a threat but rather as an opportunity for renewal. History shows that CRE has always been able to adapt to the changing times without losing its identity. The OBE approach can be a tool to strengthen the relevance of CRE in modern society. Ultimately, the success of implementing this policy will heavily depend on the commitment of all stakeholders in Christian education. With a proactive and creative attitude, the OBE-based CRE curriculum can become an effective means of producing graduates who are academically competent and spiritually robust. This is both a challenge and a great opportunity for the future of CRE in Indonesia.

Challenges and Opportunities in Maintaining Theological Identity Amid National Standards

Christian universities in Indonesia are currently at an interesting crossroads between maintaining their theological identity and meeting the demands of national education standards. Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 on Higher Education Standards has created a new dynamic that forces Christian educational institutions to conduct a deep reflection on their position within the national education ecosystem. On one hand, they must comply with government regulations that emphasize standardization and competency, while on the other hand, they have the responsibility to uphold the purity of Christian teachings and values that form the foundation of their existence. (Sanusi, Asbari, & Ardiansah, 2023)

The most fundamental conceptual challenge is how to redefine theological identity within the framework of a national standard that tends to be secular. (Huss, 2014) Many Christian universities grapple with a fundamental question: How to maintain theological distinctiveness when all study programs must adhere to the same national qualification framework? This tension is particularly felt in formulating learning outcomes that must meet national standards while also reflecting Christian values. It is not uncommon for concerns to arise that the focus on competencies and practical skills will erode the spiritual dimension and character formation that are at the core of Christian education.

The practical challenges faced are no less complex. At the operational level, many lecturers face difficulties in designing syllabi that integrate OBE requirements with traditional theological approaches. The evaluation system oriented towards measurable learning outcomes is often not easy to apply to formative courses such as character building or spirituality. Moreover, the pressure to meet various institutional performance indicators sometimes forces Christian universities to allocate resources that could otherwise be used for the development of theological aspects.

However, behind these various challenges, there lies a great opportunity to revitalize the theology curriculum. National standards can actually serve as a momentum to reevaluate and update the theology curriculum that may have stagnated for years. Outcome-based approaches encourage theology educators to be more creative in designing learning experiences that are not only intellectually rich but also spiritually transformative. (Dano, 2024) Thus, theological identity is not lost, but rather strengthened through methods that are more relevant to the needs of the times.

Another opportunity that arises is the opening of space for more intense interdisciplinary collaboration. National standards that emphasize the development of cross-disciplinary competencies allow theology to engage more closely with other fields of study. (Sudjatnika, Paturohmah, & SS, 2025) For example, Christian ethics courses could be designed in conjunction with law or business programs, so that students not only understand theological theory but are also able to apply it in a professional context. Such collaboration can actually enrich theological understanding while also enhancing the relevance of theological education in society.

The contextualization of theology also receives a broader space within the framework of national standards. The flexibility provided in the development of local curricula allows each institution to adjust theological material to the socio-cultural context of its respective region. Theology is no longer taught as abstract knowledge, but as a response to the concrete challenges faced by the surrounding community. This approach not only makes theology more relevant but also helps maintain a vibrant and dynamic theological identity.

Another important opportunity is the professionalization of theology educators. The demands of national standards encourage theology lecturers to continuously develop their pedagogical competencies. Training in innovative teaching methods, the development of creative teaching materials, and the use of educational technology have become unavoidable necessities. This process will

ultimately enhance the quality of theological teaching without sacrificing the depth of the material. Professional theology professors not only master theological content but also convey it using methods that meet the needs of 21st-century learning. (Markham, 2010)

Amidst these various opportunities, Christian colleges need to develop wise strategies to ensure that adapting to national standards does not mean compromising their theological identity. One approach that can be taken is to strengthen a clear institutional vision and mission. By having a clear understanding of its founding purpose, a Christian college will find it easier to set boundaries in adopting national standards without losing its identity.

Another important aspect is building a learning community system among theological educators. Through regular discussion forums, the lecturers can share experiences and strategies in integrating theological values with the demands of the national curriculum. Such a community will become a space for mutual support and the development of best practices in theological education that remain faithful to Christian identity while being responsive to the demands of the times.

The role of the church as a primary stakeholder must not be overlooked. The active involvement of the church in the curriculum development process can ensure that national standards do not erode the theological identity of Christian colleges. (Vhembo, 2019) The church can function as a critical partner that continually reminds about the importance of maintaining Christian distinctiveness in every aspect of education. In the end, the challenge of maintaining theological identity amidst national standards is not something to be feared, but rather an opportunity for creative renewal. The history of the church shows that the Christian faith has always been able to adapt to various cultural contexts without losing its essence. Similarly, theological education in Indonesia should be able to respond to national standards without losing its Christian identity.

What is needed now is the courage to face these challenges with creativity and integrity. By leveraging the various opportunities available, Christian colleges can actually strengthen their theological identity through this adaptation process. The true theological identity is not something static and rigid, but rather something alive, dynamic, and capable of responding to the changes of the times without losing its essence. The future of theological education in Indonesia will be greatly determined by how Christian universities respond to this challenge. If done wisely, national standards can actually become a tool to purify and strengthen theological identity, rather than erode it. Now is the time for Christian theological education to prove that it can be salt and light in the national education world, providing a unique contribution that cannot be offered by other educational institutions.

Adaptation Strategies that can be Implemented by Christian Universities

Christian universities in Indonesia face complex challenges in responding to changes in national education policy while maintaining their theological identity. (Tarumingi & Kampilong, 2024) To face this challenge, a comprehensive and sustainable adaptation strategy is needed. Adaptation strategies aim not only to meet regulatory demands but, more importantly, to strengthen the position of Christian universities as unique institutions within the Indonesian higher education ecosystem.

Capacity development becomes the main foundation in the adaptation strategy of Christian universities. These institutions need to systematically enhance the competencies of lecturers and educational staff through structured training programs. The focus of capacity development must encompass three important aspects: a deep understanding of national education policies, mastery of innovative OBE-based learning methodologies, and the ability to integrate Christian values within the framework of the national curriculum. This capacity development program should not be a one-time event, but rather a

continuous process adjusted to the dynamics of policy changes.

The enhancement of theological faculty capacity requires a special approach considering the unique characteristics of this discipline. (Susanto, 2014) Christian universities need to design training programs that help theology lecturers translate traditional theological knowledge into learning outcomes that meet national standards. (Kia & Majesty, 2025) The main challenge is to shift the teaching paradigm from a content-based approach to a competency-based approach without losing theological depth. For that, mentors are needed who not only understand OBE but also have strong theological insights.

In addition to individual capacity development, Christian colleges also need to strengthen institutional capacity. This includes the development of an internal quality assurance system capable of ensuring that all study programs meet national standards while maintaining Christian character. This system must include a comprehensive evaluation mechanism that not only measures academic achievements but also the spiritual development of students. (Tuegeh & Majesty, 2025) Strengthening institutional capacity also includes the development of supporting infrastructure such as digital libraries, learning laboratories, and integrated information systems.

The second equally important adaptation strategy is to build a strong collaborative network among Christian universities. Amid the limited resources possessed by each institution, collaboration becomes the key to facing challenges together. This network can serve as a platform for sharing resources, experiences, and best practices in implementing national policies. Collaboration can take various forms, ranging from faculty exchanges, joint curriculum development, to the organization of joint study programs.

Collaborative networks need to be built not only among Christian higher education institutions but also with general educational institutions. (de Muynck, Hoencamp, Póór, & Pálfi, 2023) Strategic partnerships with leading universities can provide access to resources and expertise that Christian colleges may not possess. Such collaboration also opens up opportunities for broader recognition of the quality of education offered by Christian higher education institutions. Importantly, this collaboration must be built on the principles of mutual respect and mutual benefit, without sacrificing Christian identity.

The formation of a consortium of Christian universities could be a strategic step to strengthen collective bargaining power. (Julius & DiGiovanni Jr, 2019) This consortium can serve as a platform to develop joint guidelines on the implementation of national policies in the Christian education environment, advocate for policies, and develop specific quality standards that exceed the national minimum standards. By uniting in a consortium, the voices of Christian higher education institutions will be more heard in the national education discourse.

Sustained research is the third pillar in the adaptation strategy of Christian higher education institutions. Research is necessary to map the impact of national policies on theological education, identify specific challenges faced, and develop innovative models to respond to these changes. The focus of the research should encompass pedagogical, theological, and managerial aspects to provide a holistic picture of the position of Christian higher education within the national education landscape.

Research on best practices in other countries facing similar challenges can provide valuable insights. (Gong & Suresh, 2017) Many Christian colleges around the world have developed creative adaptation models to national education standards without sacrificing their identity. (Hulme, Groom Jr, & Heltzel, 2016) Comparative studies of these models can inspire locally contextual solutions. Importantly, the research findings must be translated into practical recommendations that are directly applicable in the Indonesian context.

Christian universities also need to develop a research culture among faculty and students. This culture will create a healthy intellectual dynamic while also generating new knowledge to face contemporary challenges. Collaborative research between theology lecturers and lecturers from other disciplines can produce innovative interdisciplinary approaches in Christian education. Research results must be widely disseminated, not only among academics but also to stakeholders such as churches and the general public.

Multilateral dialogue is the fourth crucial adaptation strategy. Christian universities need to proactively build communication with various stakeholders, including the government, professional associations, churches, and the community. Dialogue with the government is important to convey the specific aspirations and concerns of Christian higher education, while also demonstrating a commitment to meeting national standards. Good communication will help create mutual understanding and possibly open up space for more accommodating policies.

Dialogue with the church as a primary partner is equally important. The church needs to be involved in the strategic decision-making process regarding the direction of Christian higher education development. (Barton, 2019) Input from the church will ensure that the adaptation to national standards does not compromise the institution's spiritual mission. On the other hand, higher education institutions need to explain to the church about the demands and dynamics of contemporary higher education so that there is a mutual understanding of the need for adaptation.

Dialogue with the broader community, including alumni and the workforce, also needs to be strengthened. This interaction will help Christian universities understand the real needs of society for their graduates, while also serving as a means to demonstrate the tangible contributions of Christian education to national development. Through intensive dialogue, the image of Christian universities as institutions relevant to the needs of the times will become even stronger.

The fifth adaptation strategy that needs to be considered is the development of an innovative curriculum. Christian colleges must be brave enough to evaluate and revise their curriculum periodically to respond to policy changes and the needs of the times. An innovative curriculum is one that can harmoniously integrate the demands of national standards with the distinctiveness of Christian education. A flexible modular approach can enable faster adaptation to policy changes. (Sihotang, Limbong, Simbolon, Tampubolon, & Silalahi, 2019)

An important element in curriculum development is the creation of courses that creatively integrate faith and science. Courses such as "Christian Ethics in the Profession" or "Value-Based Christian Leadership" can serve as examples of how Christian values are internalized within the framework of professional competencies. (Febrianty et al., 2020) Curriculum development also needs to consider the need for Christian character formation through more experiential and transformative methods.

Christian colleges also need to develop a strong learning support system. This includes strengthening the library with up-to-date collections, developing learning laboratories, and utilizing digital technology for education. This support system must be designed not only to meet accreditation standards but also to genuinely enhance the quality of theological and other studies in the Christian environment.

The financial aspect also needs to be addressed in the adaptation strategy. Christian colleges must develop sustainable financing models, not just relying on traditional sources like church donations or student tuition fees. The development of mission-oriented enterprises can serve as an alternative source of funding while also providing practical experience for students. (Mazzucato, 2018) Lastly, but by no means least, Christian colleges need to build a strong monitoring and evaluation system to measure the effectiveness of various adaptation strategies implemented. This system must be capable of providing quick and accurate feedback for continuous improvement. Evaluation should not only

look at quantitative aspects such as graduation rates or graduate employability but also qualitative aspects such as the spiritual development and character of students.

The implementation of this adaptation strategy requires visionary and courageous leadership at the institutional level. (Elmanisar, Utami, Gistituati, & Anisah, 2024) Christian higher education leaders must be able to bridge the demands of the modern academic world and the legacy of Christian tradition. They need to have a clear vision of the role of Christian higher education institutions in the context of Indonesia's diversity, as well as the managerial skills to realize that vision. By implementing this comprehensive adaptation strategy, Christian universities will not only be able to survive amidst changes in national education policies but can actually develop into centers of excellence that provide unique contributions to the world of education and the broader society. The key to success lies in the ability to respond to changes with creativity and integrity, without losing the fundamental identity as a learning community rooted in Christian faith.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 on Higher Education Standards significantly impacts the development of the Outcome-Based Education (OBE) curriculum for Christian Religious Education (CRE). On one hand, this policy encourages the improvement of learning quality by emphasizing measurable graduate outcomes that are relevant to the needs of the workforce. However, on the other hand, the OBE approach demands a transformation of the CRE curriculum that not only emphasizes mastery of theological content but also the development of measurable practical skills and Christian character. Christian colleges are challenged to design a curriculum that integrates national standards with the unique mission of faith formation, without losing the theological essence that is the foundation of CRE. This policy has the potential to erode the space for deepening Christian

values if it is not balanced with the formulation of learning outcomes that integrate academic and spiritual competencies. However, opportunities remain open through flexibility in local curriculum development, where Christian universities can design courses that strengthen the integration of faith and knowledge. Adaptation strategies that can be implemented include: strengthening the capacity of lecturers in designing OBE learning that remains oriented towards the formation of Christian character, collaboration among Christian universities to develop CRE curriculum guidelines that align with national standards while still rich in theological values, and intensive dialogue with the government and ecclesiastical stakeholders to ensure that national education policies provide space for the holistic development of CRE. Thus, Permendikbudristek No. 53 of 2023 can serve as a momentum for improving the quality of CRE without sacrificing its distinctive theological identity.

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