International Journal of Education and Practice
2025 Vol. 13, No. 2, pp. 772-787
ISSN(e): 2310-3868
ISSN(p): 2311-6897
DOI: 10.18488/61.v13i2.4132

Freedom to learn: An education policy applied in Indonesia and its potential benefits as perceived by Islamic education students

Rustan Efendy[1+]
Muhammad Amri[2]
Siti Hawa Lubis[3]
Nur Afifah Khurin Maknin[4]
Abdul Rahim Karim[5]

[1]*Department of Islamic Education, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Parepare, Indonesia.*
Email: rustanefendy@iainpare.ac.id
[2]*Department of Arabic Education, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Ternate, Ternate, Indonesia.*
Email: amrimarniujung@iain-ternate.ac.id
[3]*Department of Islamic Education, Universitas Medan Area, Medan, Indonesia.*
Email: sitihawa@staff.uma.ac.id
[4]*Department of Islamic Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang, Malang, Indonesia.*
Email: nuraffifah@umm.ac.id
[5]*Department of Islamic Education, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Palopo, Palopo, Indonesia.*
Email: abdulrahimkarim@iainpalopo.ac.id

(+ Corresponding author)

Article History
Received: 16 September 2024
Revised: 20 February 2025
Accepted: 3 March 2025
Published: 10 March 2025

Keywords
Educational policy
Freedom to learn
Islamic education students.

ABSTRACT

This study establishes a model for students-perceived merits of the policy of freedom to learn applied in Indonesia. The main purpose of this study is to construct the number of perceptions of Islamic students and create factors taking into account the variation in a set of indicators. A quantitative method was designed in this study to process data that were collected using a questionnaire. The sample consisted of 273 participants in Islamic higher education institutions. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was employed to model and present results of data. The results find that Islamic students-perceived merits on the policy of freedom to learn applied in their campus create applicable eleven indicators that are constructed into the following three factors consisting of timeliness, comparability and persistence. This finding discloses that the educational policy through freedom benefits students of Islamic education in the context of timeliness, comparability and persistence. This study is intended to be addressed to policymakers and regulators, offering evidence-based recommendations that can inform the development and refinement of policies in the higher education sector. In this regard, the study serves as constructive feedback on the existing policies in Indonesia with the potential to guide future policy adjustments and improvements to better meet the needs and expectations of education.

Contribution/Originality: Many studies have explored the evaluation, preparedness, and implementation of the freedom to learn policy but none have constructed a framework that considers its implementation from the viewpoint of Islamic students' perceived benefits. This study offers a significant contribution to the ongoing dialogue in Indonesia and presents an initial research design focused on identifying key constructs for conceptual development within the learning context.

1. INTRODUCTION

An academic education is primarily concerned with the advancement and mastery of scientific disciplines. There is a pressing need to enhance the education system in light of the challenges posed by social changes, particularly the rise in online interactions and the rapid advancement of technology (Burbules, Fan, & Repp, 2020). Higher education must assume a more prominent role in fostering the growth of human competencies. Furthermore, the advent of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID -19) pandemic has fundamentally altered the method of learning necessitating a rethink of the educational paradigm in universities (García-Morales, Garrido-Moreno, & Martín-Rojas, 2021; Naqvi & Sahu, 2020). Consequently, universities across the world are striving to implement reforms to address the emerging challenges (Pham & Ho, 2020). The continued relevance of universities hinges on their capacity to navigate disruptions and equip students with the skills to respond and adapt to social change and evolving global education paradigms.

The evolution of education policy is often a response to issues in the field which is a consequence of the lack of robust concepts (Hasbullah, 2015). Multiple policies have been put in place at the governmental level to ensure the production of highly skilled graduates. The implementation of regulatory measures, including educational policies, represents a key strategy for improving the quality of the education system. The education policy represents a political struggle between instrumental outcomes and human emancipation (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 2013). It comprises a series of objectives, strategies and initiatives (Hough, 1984). In Indonesia, the national government has been attempting to reconcile itself with Regulation of Minister of Education and Culture No. 3 2020 concerning the National Standards for Higher Education which includes the program of freedom to learn (Kemendikbud, 2020b). This is a novel idea that allows students to have the freedom to learn (Muhajir et al., 2021). The policy also contains several fundamental principles including the paradigmatic conception of independent learning in response to technological and information disruption and the global civilization which necessitates connectivity between all lines of life (Tohir, 2020). Furthermore, this policy contributes to the implementation of an entrepreneurial university (Klofsten et al., 2019) and encourages students to master various subjects according to their respective passions so that they are ready to compete in the global world (Baharuddin, 2021).

The freedom to learn is regarded as a key factor in enabling students to achieve academic success and well-being. In this regard, the freedom to learn enables students to select their courses according to their preferences (Yuhastina, Parahita, Astutik, Ghufronudin, & Purwanto, 2020). In this regard, the freedom to learn enables students to select their courses according to their preferences. In principle, the change in the educational paradigm is expected to become more autonomous with an innovative learning culture, thereby facilitating a more autonomous and flexible learning process in tertiary institutions (Tohir, 2020).

Since its inception in 2019, this program has been subjected to rigorous evaluation. It is regarded as a significant advancement in the realm of educational transformation. It continues to elicit a range of responses and debates. Nevertheless, the policy of freedom to learn represents a crucial manifestation of student-centered learning. A number of challenges have emerged including those related to funding and apprenticeships following the implementation of this policy for a period of one year. However, the policy has also presented opportunities to develop skills that are highly sought after in the modern workplace such as innovation, creativity and self-reliance. These skills are essential for navigating real-world problems interacting with others and working collaboratively to achieve shared goals (Arifin & Muslim, 2020; Hudjimartsu, Prayudyanto, Permana, & Heryansyah, 2022; Meke, Astro, & Daud, 2022; Sherly, Dharma, & Sihombing, 2020; Supriati, Dewi, Supriyanti, & Azizah, 2022). The independent learning program has the potential to significantly enhance the development of soft skills.

The policy of freedom to learn has been in effect for a period of two years commencing in 2021. Scholars have the opportunity to evaluate this policy (Andari, Windasari, Setiawan, & Rifqi, 2021; Drajat, 2004; Khusniyah & Hakim, 2019). The results indicate that the policy has been implemented and has facilitated independent learning and an active, innovative learning atmosphere. The studies have provided feedback on the implementation of the

policy. Additionally, students have expressed positive perceptions after participating in the freedom to learn policy (Baharuddin, 2021; Insani, Fitriasari, & Iswandi, 2021; Kamalia & Andriansyah, 2021). For instance, they have engaged in the student exchange program and entrepreneurial activities.

Today's learning system in Indonesia affords students the autonomy to pursue their educational endeavors. Students will be afforded the opportunity to develop their passion and talent to the fullest extent possible. The objective is to encourage students to develop a range of competencies and knowledge that will be valuable in their transition into the workforce. The program places an emphasis on the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity and innovation, communication skills, technological literacy and soft skills in students. The system has engendered the expectation of enhanced provision in the field of higher education particularly in the context of Islamic higher education (Nurtjahyati & Sukisno, 2021). The policy also affects students of Islamic education in the context of educational institutions under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. However, freedom to learn has implications for the educational system where higher education under Islamic principles is eager to change the learning paradigm as a policy (Mufid & Arifin, 2021; Siregar, Sahirah, & Harahap, 2020). Indeed, Islamic universities are responding rapidly to this policy which is of great urgency and will undoubtedly bring about a significant breakthrough in the millennial era of education as well as reduce the bureaucratization of education (Mustagfiroh, 2020; Nofia, 2020).

1.1. Research Gap

Studies regarding freedom to learn in Islamic educational institutions have been the subject of numerous studies (Anisa, 2022; Arifin, Abidin, & Al Anshori, 2021). There is a paucity of research design on this issue notwithstanding the preceding studies. The implementation of the policy of freedom to learn has yielded benefits from the perspective of the students who have reported positive effects on their personal development (Hakim, Fajri, & Faizah, 2022). In the relative research, a number of studies have been conducted into the evaluation, readiness and implementation of the policy of freedom to learn. However, none have yet modelled the framework of implementation from the perspective of the benefits perceived by Islamic students. The Indonesian government has launched the freedom to learn policy. The policy notes the idea of freedom for students to improve the quality of the learning system.

1.2. Research Question and Significance

This study formulates a key question, i.e., how freedom to learn as the educational policy applied in Indonesia could be constructed under Islamic education students-perceived benefits. The use of exploratory factor analysis will facilitate the identification of the common causes contributing to Islamic students' perceived benefits and enable the analysis of the latent variable influencing the effectiveness of freedom to learn. Therefore, it is important to design this study to provide a conceptual model of the relationship between variables. Consequently, this study is significantly conducted to make a contribution to the ongoing issue in Indonesia and provides an initial research design for identifying constructs for the purpose of concept-based learning in the context of learning.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. The Concept of Freedom to Learn

The concept of freedom to learn essentially gives freedom and autonomy to the educational institution. This policy is also based on a strong legal basis and the reality of the world of education based on humanism, namely an educational construct that places humans on their autonomy in understanding the reality of the universe (Fathurahman, 2020; Susilawati, 2021). Therefore, humanism pioneered by Rogers (1969) in the educational system is included in the context of freedom to learn. He stated that freedom to learn is a way to save generations from this educational model. Schools have to improve their system from the traditional or conservative approach.

Educational systems tend not to resist change. Carl Rogers's humanism is in line with the idea and policy concerning freedom to learn. It enables to create a complete student identity as a free human being so that the educational system has to prioritize aspects of affection, creativity, and freedom of thought (Sili, 2021). In addition, Carl Rogers' humanistic approach implies that freedom to learn serves as a climate to underpin the actualization of students in the learning process (Rogers, 1995). Freedom to learn contains a humanism tenet that places people as individuals who have freedom in expressing and developing themselves according to their respective interests (Witono & Widodo, 2023). For instance, the form of humanism can be found when students can take 20 credits outside the established study programs.

2.2. The Implementation of Freedom to Learn in Indonesia

The implementation of freedom to learn in Indonesia is subject to a number of rules and regulations. These rules and regulations encompass the National Standards for Higher Education, regulations pertaining to the accreditation of higher education institutions, regulations concerning student graduation and new student admissions, general guidelines for community assistance program and legal bases for the independent campus program. Article 18 paragraph 3 has been operationalized as "Merdeka Belajar, Kampus Merdeka-MBKM (freedom to learn and independent campus)" under the Regulation of Minister of Education and Culture No. 3 2020 concerning National Standards for Higher Education (Kemendikbud, 2020b). This regulation notes the idea of freedom to learn which is recognized to give freedom to higher education particularly students to be independent and self-sufficient where students would have the ability to work and use technology and skills which is not depending on others to decide their future (Kemendikbud, 2020a, 2020c).

In Indonesia, freedom to learn is a new educational policy in Indonesia that aims to create a generation of students with high-level intelligence and skills of logical, critical, analytical, innovative and creative thinking. It provides freedom of thought determined by the teacher and focuses on the uniqueness of each individual. It also has several principles, including emancipated learning, emancipated campus, and operational school funds. This concept is a response to the needs of the education system in the era of the industrial revolution 4.0, which requires human resources with critical thinking and problem-solving skills, creativity, innovation, and the ability to communicate through information technology and collaborate. The goal is to create an Indonesian generation with a high level of intelligence equipped with the skills of logical, critical, analytical, innovative, and creative thinking.

2.3. Advantages of Freedom to Learn

The policy of freedom to learn encourages students to master several sciences that can be used by them as provisions. The program in this policy in higher education is manifested in a flexible and independent learning process to create an active and innovative learning atmosphere, not restrictive to student needs covering three aspects, namely aspects of attitudes, knowledge, and skills so that it aims to adjust the needs of graduates to the needs of the business and industrial world as well as to develop cross-and-transdisciplinary science. It is intended to realize an autonomous and flexible learning process in higher education so as to create an innovative, non-restrictive learning culture in accordance with the students' needs.

The benefits provided in the implementation of the policy of freedom to learn are the opportunities to study three semesters outside the study program, join student exchanges and internships and have teaching assistance in educational units, making research and humanitarian projects. The implementation of the policy requires collaboration and cooperation with partners or other parties related to their scientific fields and participation in supporting the desired learning outcomes (Wulandari et al., 2021). Thus, it gives merits to the quality of students.

On the other hand, lecturers can change the approach to get competence in accordance with what is needed by students as for the learning process in primary institutions. The role of lecturers would shift to being a companion for students to explore competence, science and technology. Educational institutions can produce superior,

creative, innovative and competent human resources that are suitable for the employment world. Lecturers have not been able to collaborate with students in terms of research and community services. Lecturers act as supervisors, mentors, and facilitators for students in undertaking learning outside the study program. Lecturers are no longer the only source of information regarding teaching materials but they can collaborate with the community, and industry to help students discover their personality development capacity with the independent learning program. Overall, the policy applied in Indonesia concerning the freedom to learn is a strategy to improve the educational quality (Tabroni & Nurarita, 2021). Some of the competencies and knowledge that students can master are the development of critical thinking skills. Students are encouraged to analyze and evaluate information, arguments, and evidence to make informed decisions; the program of freedom to learn also focuses on developing problem-solving skills in students. Students are encouraged to identify problems, generate and evaluate solutions, and implement effective solutions. Students are led to think creatively and innovatively. They are encouraged to generate new ideas, products, and services that can contribute to the development of society; are encouraged to express their ideas and opinions effectively, listen actively, and collaborate with others and are encouraged to use technology effectively and efficiently to enhance their learning and problem-solving skills. The program emphasizes the development of soft skills in students, including teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and resilience. These skills are essential for success in the workplace and in life.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative approach was designed in this study. It employed a survey design and distributed a self-completed questionnaire to obtain primary data. The policy was implemented in 2022 and initially applied to bachelor's degrees, so this study focused on the third-year students involved in participating in the program of freedom to learn.

This study employed common factor analysis through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) procedures. This is useful to identify the latent construct for the creation of measurement instruments and the development of concepts (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2011). The participants were invited to respond to a construct comprising 14 statements using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (disagree). The responses to the items comprising the statement were subjected to factor analysis in order to ascertain the underlying structure of the measure. The data were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Once the factors had been identified, a structural model was constructed using Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) graphics in order to describe the constructed factors. The EFA has been employed by researchers in the absence of a hypothesis although it is important to note that this approach is based on certain assumptions regarding the factor structure (Coulacoglou & Saklofske, 2017). The objective of this analysis is to identify the common factors that can be expressed as a linear combination of the original variables (Fabrigar & Wegener, 2011; Trendafilov & Hirose, 2022). In the course of the EFA, a correlation matrix was constructed to examine the interrelationships between the items. A latent variable is referred to as a factor and the relationships between latent and observed variables are defined as factor loadings (Fontaine, 2005). The essence of the factor analysis is to ascertain the number of underlying fundamental effects associated with latent variables.

3.2. Research Population

A purposive sampling strategy was employed to identify the requisite number of participants who were students enrolled in Islamic higher education. Two Islamic higher education institutions that have implemented a freedom to learn policy are the State Islamic Institute of Parepare and the State Islamic Institute of Ternate which are known as Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Parepare and Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Ternate, respectively. The data collected through the questionnaire were exported from Google Forms and sent through

WhatsApp to the target population. Saturation sampling was used in this study. A total of 273 students were involved in the implementation of the policy.

3.3. Research Instrument

The preliminary stage of the EFA entailed the formulation of statements pertaining to the freedom to learn, based on the perceived benefits from the perspective of the students. A total of 14 statements were formulated for respondents to complete. A total of 273 respondents were selected using the saturation sampling technique, and all 273 questionnaires were duly recovered. A five-point Likert scale was employed to quantify each indicator with the following values: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly agree = 1. The questionnaire contained 14 items shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Research instrument questionnaire.

Item 1	**The credits of my course are recognized and equivalent to the hours of teaching activities that I am undergoing.**
Item 2	I am disciplined to complete the report when taking part in the research program.
Item 3	I study three semesters outside my study program.
Item 4	I was challenged during the entrepreneurial program.
Item 5	The program activities are engaged with my potential and passion.
Item 6	Research collaboration with the lecturer helps me improve my final report (Thesis).
Item 7	Humanitarian projects based on the freedom to learn program are well carried out.
Item 8	The recommendation from the lecturer is helpful for taking independent learning.
Item 9	I am easy to fill in the logbook when joining the internship program.
Item 10	The report of my activity during the independent learning program is well-organized.
Item 11	I am comfortable participating in another study program.
Item 12	I benefit from the student exchange program.
Item 13	I benefit from the internship program and research collaboration.
Item 14	Three semesters to conduct freedom to learn on another campus are well arranged.

3.4. Validity and Reliability Tests

EFA is a statistical method in the development and validation of the theories and measurement (Watkins, 2018). The validity of the questionnaire was verified by the field expert who helped finalize the factors. Content and face validity were a pre-test to ascertain the fit measurement (Taherdoost & Group, 2017). A reliability test was conducted with Cronbach's alpha reaching more than 0.7 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2014; Henson & Roberts, 2006; Kline, 2016; Lloret, Ferreres, Hernández, & Tomás, 2017). The procedure of EFA was divided into three steps including the identification of the correlation between factors, the extraction of factors, and the rotation of factors (Chua, 2018). The requirements used in the overall significance of the correlation matrix are Barlett's test of sphericity which should indicate a p-value less than 0.05 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2010; Kaiser, 1974; Taherdoost & Group, 2017) and Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) which is required as the measure of sampling adequacy with a high value of the statistic of 0.5 to 1 (Watkins, 2018). In addition to the criteria, the extraction of factors using a principal component analysis is over 0.5 while the eigenvalue is greater than one which can be shown in the scree plot. The last stage is factor rotation showing the number of constructed components. In terms of the fit model, the goodness of fit test must show a significance of less than 0.05. The result of EFA is further modeled under the use of SEM-AMOS.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Descriptive Information

The respondents included 273 students of Islamic education. Table 2 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the respondents' describing items of gender, academic specialization and place of residence. The gender shows 44% males and 56% females, respectively. In terms of age group, the respondents aged 19, 20, and 21 years old are 55%,

27%, and 18%, respectively. The majority of the respondents live in cities around 44% while the rest (56%) live in rural areas.

This study presents Table 3 on descriptive statistics for items measuring freedom to learn constructs after describing the respondents. On average, the respondents have a high tendency towards independent learning (3.69) with the number of observations of 273 people.

Table 2. Profile of respondents.

Information	Type	Number	Percentage
Gender	Male	120	44%
	Female	153	56%
Age	19	150	55%
	20	73	27%
	21	50	18%
Place for residence	Urban area	119	44%
	Rural area	154	56%

Table 3. Descriptive statistics.

Item number	Mean	Std dev	Skewness	SE
Item1	3.44	0.950	-0.212	0.147
Item 2	3.84	0.887	-0.703	0.147
Item 3	3.26	0.933	-0.184	0.147
Item 4	3.34	0.935	0.079	0.147
Item 5	3.24	0.985	0.289	0.147
Item 6	4.03	1.048	-1.325	0.147
Item 7	3.59	0.896	-0.292	0.147
Item 8	4.05	0.807	-0.474	0.147
Item 9	3.81	0.866	-0.544	0.147
Item 10	3.58	1.012	-0.506	0.147
Item 11	3.79	0.885	-0.251	0.147
Item 12	3.94	0.864	-0.748	0.147
Item 13	4.04	0.861	-1.026	0.147
Item 14	3.70	0.965	-0.603	0.147
Overall	3.69			
Number of observations	273			

Table 4. Reliability statistics.

Item number	Value
Item1	0.829
Item 2	0.825
Item 3	0.830
Item 4	0.828
Item 5	0.840
Item 6	0.840
Item 7	0.831
Item 8	0.828
Item 9	0.823
Item 10	0.821
Item 11	0.829
Item 12	0.832
Item 13	0.834
Item 14	0.823
Number of observation = 14 Cronbach's alpha = 0.840 Cronbach's alpha on standardized items = 0.842	

4.2. Preliminary Analysis

The initial analysis is required to ensure data reliability. The analysis of the skewness of each item is conducted to confirm the normality of the data. The data assumed to be normally distributed is less than one (Field, 2013). According to Table 3, each item is normally distributed. Other analyses include reliability (>0.7) and communality (>0.5). The result of reliability statistics shows more than 0.7 indicating that the items in this study are reliable (see Table 4).

A principal component analysis was conducted with respect to the communality. The result of each item was found to be greater than 0.5 with the exception of item 5 (see Table 5). Therefore, this item should be excluded from the subsequent analysis. Finally, 13 items were explored using factor analysis following preliminary analysis.

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Table 5. Communalities.

Item number	Initial	Extraction	Final extraction
Item 1	1.000	0.688	0.710
Item 2	1.000	0.615	0.610
Item 3	1.000	0.621	0.655
Item 4	1.000	0.694	0.708
Item 5	1.000	0.270	Removed
Item 6	1.000	0.786	0.779
Item 7	1.000	0.632	0.614
Item 8	1.000	0.501	0.504
Item 9	1.000	0.656	0.660
Item 10	1.000	0.712	0.717
Item 11	1.000	0.611	0.613
Item 12	1.000	0.755	0.761
Item 13	1.000	0.748	0.743
Item 14	1.000	0.732	0.738

4.3. Model Fit Result

It is essential to consider the aspect of model fit to obtain an adequate analysis and acceptable result. The suitability of the data for exploratory factor analysis is indicated by the value of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and the results of Bartlett's test of sphericity which meet the requisite criteria. According to Table 6, the KMO result is 0.831 and the p-value from Bartlett's test is at the 0.000 level. Consequently, the data are deemed to exhibit sufficient correlation.

Table 6. KMO and Bartlett's test.

KMO value	**0.831**
Approx. chi-square	1697.064
Bartlett's test of sphericity-degrees of freedom	78
Significance	0.000

Once the requisite data has been obtained, the determination of factors is made through the use of eigenvalues and a scree plot. The eigenvalues of the 13 items are presented in Table 7 to ascertain the proportion of total variance explained by each factor. The scree plot is depicted in Figure 1 for the same purpose serving as a confirmation test. The eigenvalues of more than one are selected as factors of the model of this study. In this regard, the extraction and rotation of the factors are also illustrated in Table 7. The results of the three factors account for 67.58% of the overall variance. Factor 1 represents 34.87% while factors 2 and 3 account for 19.40% and 13.49%, respectively.

According to Table 7 and Figure 1, the eigenvalues for three components exceed 1.0 indicating that they are suitable for consideration as factors. The fitness of the factor analysis model is shown in Table 8 in consideration of

the fit model. The result of the goodness of fit test is statistically significant at the 0.000 level. In a nutshell, the model fit results in this research design permit further analysis through EFA.

Table 7. Eigenvalue to determine the number of factors.

Components	Initial eigenvalues	% of variance	Extraction	% of variance	Rotation	% of variance
1	4.534	34.879	4.534	34.879	3.213	24.719
2	2.522	19.401	2.522	19.401	2.872	22.091
3	1.755	13.499	1.755	13.499	2.726	20.969
4	0.676					
5	0.592					
6	0.527					
7	0.498					
8	0.421					
9	0.366					
10	0.346					
11	0.325					
12	0.245					
13	0.194					

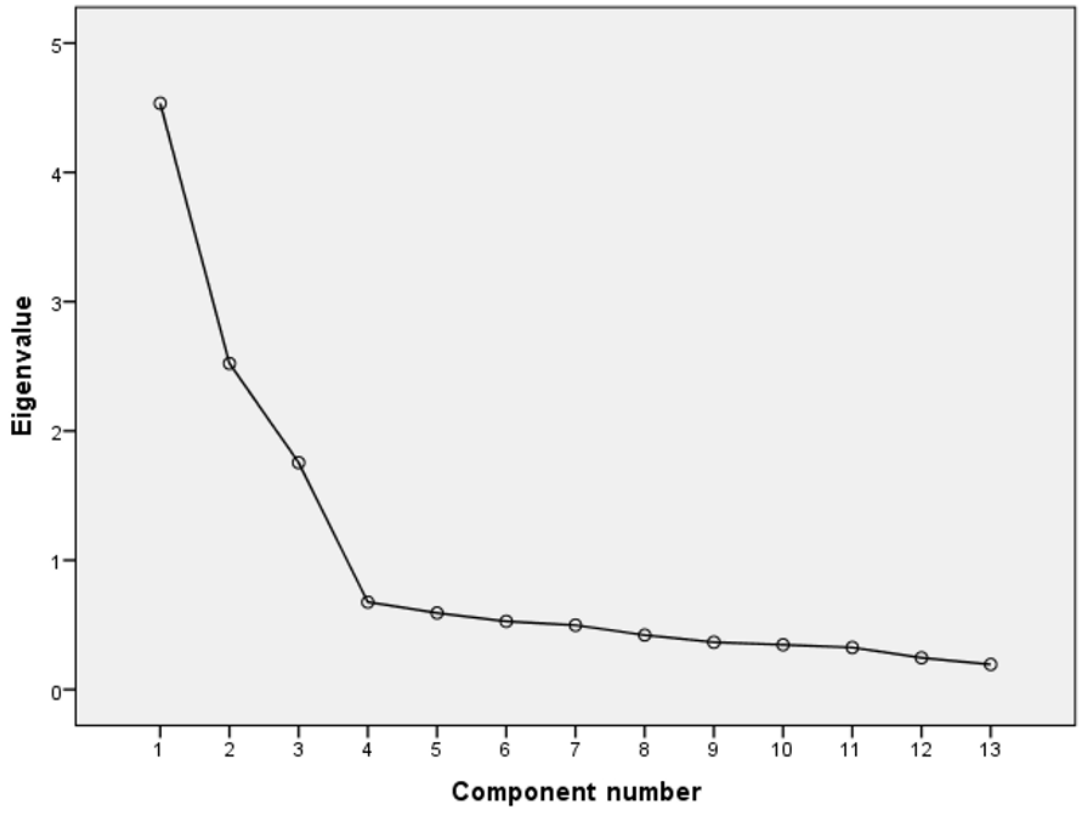

Figure 1. Scree plot.

Table 8. Goodness of fit test.

Chi-square	Df	Sig.
130.893	52	0.000

4.4. The Result of Exploratory Factor Analysis

The sample size is sufficient and adequate and the aspect of goodness of fit has been acceptable. The study further generates 13 items derived from the preliminary analysis which can be subjected to exploratory factor

analysis. A total of 13 items have been selected and grouped into three components as illustrated in Table 9 and Figure 2. All 13 items belonging to the three aforementioned components exhibited satisfactory factor loading values. A factor loading of 0.6 or higher is considered to be an acceptable level of reliability (Comrey & Lee, 2013). According to Table 9, the factor loading result exceeds 0.6 as determined by the use of a rotated component matrix. The factor loading values for each item are notably high, ranging from 0.683 to 0.865. This analysis yielded three factors and their respective items. Factor 1 is comprised of five items (item 2, item 8, item 9, item 10 and item 14) while four items are grouped into factor 2 (item 11, item 12 and item 13) and factor 3 (item 1, item 3, item 4 , and item 7), respectively. Subsequently, the factor groups are modeled in SEM as illustrated in Figure 2. Through regression, each item demonstrated significance at the 0.01 level in variances (see Table 10) and unstandardized estimates (see Table 11).

Table 9. Factors along with their items.

No.	Item numbers	1	2	3
1	Item1			0.827
2	Item 2	0.763		
3	Item 3			0.790
4	Item 4			0.813
5	Item 6		0.877	
6	Item 7			0.774
7	Item 8	0.683		
8	Item 9	0.789		
9	Item 10	0.813		
10	Item 11		0.745	
11	Item 12		0.865	
12	Item 13		0.854	
13	Item 14	0.846		

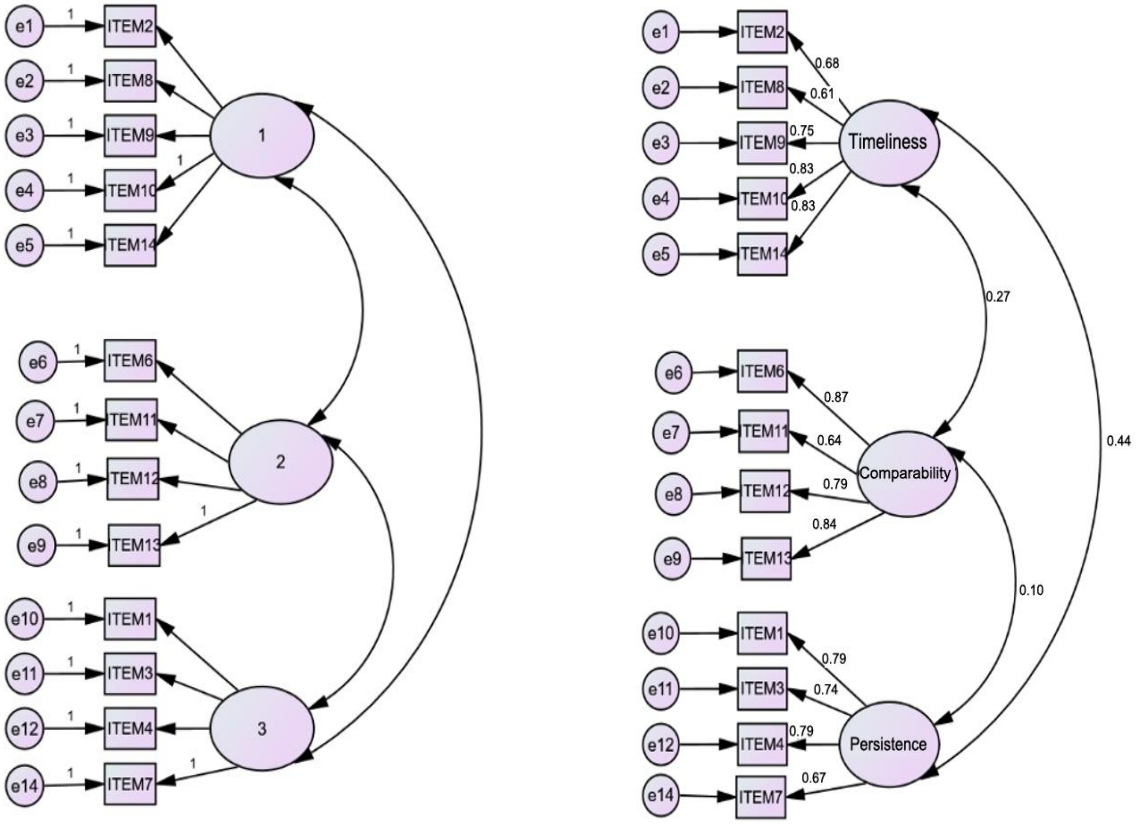

Figure 2. SEM model of three factors.

Variables exhibiting a high degree of correlation are then grouped together following the analysis of the exploratory factor. The three factors are subsequently designated as latent variables. Factor 1 is designated "timeliness" on the grounds that the items pertain to the reporting of all confirmed activities and a set of values that are furnished at the requisite time by students. Subsequently, factor 2 is designated as "comparability" which enables students to discern similarities and dissimilarities. Meanwhile, factor 3 is designated as "persistence" as all the items described by students should be persistent. In this context, persistence is defined as the quality that allows someone to continue trying to complete the task despite difficulties.

Table 10. Variances.

Names	Estimates	S.E.	C.R.	p-value
Timeliness	0.710	0.088	8.052	***
Comparability	0.517	0.064	8.102	***
Persistence	0.362	0.062	5.841	***
E4	0.311	0.039	7.965	***
E3	0.329	0.034	9.626	***
E2	0.408	0.038	10.731	***
E1	0.418	0.041	10.275	***
E9	0.221	0.028	7.885	***
E8	0.280	0.031	9.067	***
E7	0.460	0.043	10.612	***
E6	0.262	0.039	6.624	***
E14	0.437	0.044	9.885	***
E12	0.321	0.041	7.904	***
E11	0.394	0.044	9.057	***
E10	0.338	0.042	8.020	***
E5	0.286	0.036	8.018	***

Note: *** 10% respectively.

Table 11. Unstandardized estimate.

Type of items	Direction	Name of factors	Estimate	C.R.	p-value
Item10	<---	Timeliness	1.000		
Item 9	<---	Timeliness	0.768	13.370	
Item 8	<---	Timeliness	0.584	10.377	***
Item 2	<---	Timeliness	0.719	11.923	***
Item 13	<---	Comparability	1.000		
Item 12	<---	Comparability	0.947	14.520	***
Item 11	<---	Comparability	0.788	11.110	***
Item 6	<---	Comparability	1.269	16.129	***
Item 7	<---	Persistence	1.000		
Item 4	<---	Persistence	1.232	10.752	***
Item 3	<---	Persistence	1.142	10.212	***
Item 1	<---	Persistence	1.244	10.713	***
Item 14	<---	Timeliness	0.951	15.200	***

Note: *** 10% respectively.

5. DISCUSSION

A well-designed and implemented independent learning program can facilitate the perception of benefits among university students in Islamic higher education. This study examines the factors influencing the perception of the freedom to learn among Islamic students following the implementation of the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 3 of 2020 regarding the policy of freedom to learn. The factors identified in this study can be classified into three categories: timeliness, comparability, and persistence. These are illustrated in Table 12.

Table 12. Factors of Islamic education students-perceived benefits.

Item number	Statements	Factors
Item 2	I am disciplined to complete the report when taking part in the research program.	Timeliness
Item 8	The recommendation from the lecturer is helpful to take independent learning.	
Item 9	I am easy to fill in the logbook when joining the internship program.	
Item10	The report of my activity during the independent learning program is well-organized.	
Item 14	Three semesters to conduct freedom to learn on another campus are well arranged.	
Item 6	Research collaboration with the lecturer helps me improve my final report (Thesis).	Comparability
Item 11	I am comfortable in participating in another study program.	
Item 12	I benefit from the student exchange program.	
Item 13	I benefit from the internship program and research collaboration.	
Item1	The credits of my course are recognized and equivalent to the hours of teaching activities that I am undergoing.	Persistence
Item 3	I study three semesters outside my study program.	
Item 4	I feel challenged during the entrepreneurial program.	
Item 7	Humanitarian projects based on the freedom to learn program are well carried out.	

Three latent variables are found in this study. They are defined in the context of freedom to learn. In the majority of work environments, each individual is encouraged to take on an imperative role. Students are expected to commence their duties at the designated time as outlined in the policy of freedom to learn. According to Table 11, five items have been constructed to assess timeliness indicating that students are fulfilling their responsibilities in a satisfactory manner. Timeliness is of paramount importance to provide students with the quality of care they deserve. Adherence to the established schedule and consistent attendance foster the development of respectful and professional conduct. Concurrently, students derive benefit from their capacity to recognize and comprehend external environments, thereby facilitating the development of social connections, collaborative learning, and the perception of knowledge acquisition. The students are exposed to a variety of learning environments which enables them to develop their individual characteristics. These benefits are subsequently constructed in the four items that are designated as the variable of comparability and in the five items, which are named as the persistence variable. The autonomy afforded to students has been demonstrated to enhance academic performance.

The benefits of this policy as perceived by students have been significant particularly in terms of self-development as implied by Hakim et al. (2022). The program of freedom to learn can build to connect with the wider community and industry representatives, to facilitate students' capacity for self-directed learning. According to Tabroni and Nurarita (2021) this approach is designed to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia. The finding of this study also aligns with the conviction of AlYakin, Muthmainnah, Ganguli, Cardoso, and Asrifan (2023) revealing that promoting social conduct and collaborative learning is the way to increase the learning outcome for students. Overall, three constructed variables have been identified as beneficial. Timeliness can be employed as an active learning strategy to engage students and assist them in organizing and recalling information. The creation of timeliness can assist students in evaluating their knowledge, reconsidering their ideas, and analyzing new information. In the context of education, comparability is also a crucial factor when evaluating performance as it enables students to make informed decisions about their achievements. Persistence is a vital quality for achieving long-term goals and overcoming challenges. It necessitates resilience, patience and the capacity to maintain focus on the task at hand.

6. CONCLUSION

The implementation of freedom to learn confers benefits upon students. This study establishes a set of indicators for the creation of latent variables. The students' perceived benefits are employed as a means of elucidating information that has been defined in advance. The findings indicate that the freedom to learn policy which has been in place in Indonesia for approximately two years can be identified as a concept in its own right. A total of 13 valid items were constructed for the final development of the questionnaire. The items were constructed to comprise three factors, namely timeliness, comparability and persistence. This finding reveals that the concept of freedom to learn considers the factors of timeliness, comparability and persistence in relation to individual abilities and serves to alleviate cognitive dissonance.

7. IMPLICATION AND FUTURE STUDY

The findings of this study have implications for ongoing issues in Indonesia and contribute to the development of a set of indicators for grouping latent variables. This study underscores the advantages gained by students and delineates the factors that contribute to their perceived benefits. It is recommended that the findings of this study be presented to the relevant regulatory authority in higher education for their consideration. In this regard, the findings provide feedback on the educational policy that has been applied in Indonesia. It is also recommended that future studies should be conducted to test the factors constructed in this study in the confirmatory analysis factor, taking into account the nexus between dependent and independent variables. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to consider additional factors such as extracurricular involvement, access to support resources, or career development which are also limitations of this study.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.
Institutional Review Board Statement: The Ethical Committee of Institut Agama Islam Negeri (IAIN) Parepare, Indonesia, has granted approval for this study on 15 June 2022 (Ref. No. B.635/In.39/LP2M.07/11/2024).
Transparency: The authors declare that the manuscript is honest, truthful and transparent, that no important aspects of the study have been omitted and that all deviations from the planned study have been made clear. This study followed all rules of writing ethics.
Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.
Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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