

FORMING COMPETENT PRACTICAL THEOLOGY: A STUDY OF THE SUB-FIELD OF PRACTICAL THEOLOGY IN THE FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the formation and development of practical theology as a sub-field within the Faculty of Theology, Indonesian Christian University Tomohon (UKIT), under the auspices of the Evangelical Church Foundation in Minahasa (GMIM) Dominee Albertus Zakarias Runturambi Wenas. Using qualitative and interpretive approaches, informed by Osmer's four assignments on practical theological interpretation, this study examines how practical theology is conceptualized, structured, taught, and experienced in institutions. Data were collected through interviews with faculty members and students, document analysis, participant observations, and focus group discussions. The findings reveal that despite a growing awareness of the importance of practical theology, its implementation remains inconsistent across the curriculum. Practical theology is often seen more as a set of ministering skills than as a reflective academic discipline. Structural limitations include minimal credit hour allocation and poor integration with basic theological fields. The pedagogical approach remains largely lecture-based, with the use of limited experiential learning strategies. Field education experience is valuable, but it lacks consistent theological supervision and reflection. Despite these challenges, UKIT demonstrates a strong commitment to contextual theological education, although a deeper incorporation of indigenous theological resources is required. The study concludes that meaningful reform requires a multi-dimensional approach that involves conceptual reorientation, curricular revision, pedagogical innovation, strengthening of field education supervision, and deeper contextual engagement. By adopting a practical theological model that is integrative and reflective, UKIT can better equip theological leaders who are not only knowledgeable but also spiritually aligned and contextually responsive.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, *Practical Theology* has evolved from peripheral concern to a central academic discipline in theological education. No longer seen as merely "applied theology," it is now recognized as a distinct reflective and methodological field that engages with lived religious experience, pastoral practice, and contextual reality through rigorous theological investigation. (Barnard & Juliana, 2020; Schoeman, 2022; Sosedkov, 2022). This shift reflects a broader global trend toward reorganizing theological education not only as a doctrinal transmission but also a formation praxis embedded in ecclesiastical and societal contexts. (Gin et al., 2025; Hockridge, 2018; van der Knijff, 2021).

Practical theology, as an academic discipline, involves systematic theological reflection on practice, which aims to understand how faith communities interpret the divine presence and respond ethically, spiritually, and communally in concrete situations. (Bass, 2021; Osmer et al., 2008). Scholars such as Richard Osmer (2008) have emphasized its four tasks—descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic—as a framework for integrating theory and praxis. Similarly, Sergei Sosedkov (2022) and Hasting (2017) have advocated for a mission and integrative model that positions practical theology at the intersection of church, culture, and mission. (Hastings, 2017; Sosedkov, 2022)

This research focuses on the formation and strengthening of *practical theology* as a formal discipline within the Faculty of Theology, Indonesian Christian University Tomohon (UKIT), under the auspices of the Evangelical Church Foundation in Minahasa (GMIM) Dominee Albertus Zakarias Runturambi Wenas. UKIT has long played an important role in shaping Christian leaders in North Sulawesi, particularly for the GMIM church, which not only serves as a spiritual community but also as a major social and cultural institution in the region.

Despite its significance, practical theology at UKIT, as in many theological institutions in Indonesia, faces several challenges that hinder its full academic and pastoral potential. These include a curriculum that often prioritizes systematic and biblical theology over contextual engagement and ministry, pedagogical approaches that remain largely theoretical and lecture-based, and a field education component that lacks adequate theological integration and reflective supervision. (Gener, 2018; Naidoo, 2021). As a result, there is something real *gap* between the ideal vision of practical theology as a reflective and transformative discipline and its current implementation within the faculty.

This research arises from a central question:

RQ: How can the Faculty of Theology at UKIT develop a competent, contextually-grounded practical theology that equips graduates to serve effectively in the church and society?

To address this, the study adopts a qualitative and interpretive approach, informed by key methodological principles in practical theology, including Osmer's four tasks on practical theological interpretation, Sosedkov's mission and integrative models, and Bass's emphasis on practice as a formation and ecclesiastical. Through a critical examination of curricular structures, teaching methods, field placements, and institutional ethos, this study seeks to identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement (van der Kooij et al., 2022).

The significance of this inquiry lies not only in its contribution to theological education in Indonesia but also in its broader implications for the global discourse on practical theology in non-Western contexts. By placing itself in the unique socio-cultural and ecclesiastical environment of North Sulawesi, this study contributes to the growth of literature advocating a contextual, participatory, and mission understanding of practical theology. (Setiawan & van der Ven, 2019; van der Kooij et al., 2022).

Ultimately, this study aims to offer recommendations to improve the quality of practical theology education at UKIT, ensuring that practical theology education remains academically rigorous, pastorally relevant, and spiritually

formative. As such, he hopes to contribute to the ongoing effort to form theological leaders who are not only knowledgeable but also thoughtful, reflective, and deeply aligned with the realities of faith communities in a rapidly changing world.

METHOD

This research adopts qualitative and interpretive research methodologies, based on the principles of practical theology as an academic discipline and reflective practice. The choice of a qualitative approach is very suitable to explore the complex interaction between theological education, pedagogical practice, and contextual reality within the Faculty of Theology, Indonesian Christian University Tomohon (UKIT).

Research Design

This research follows a case study design, which allows for an in-depth exploration of practical theology as a sub-field in specific institutional and ecclesiastical contexts. (Yin, 2018). As Sosedkov (2022) points out, case studies are invaluable in practical theological investigation because they allow researchers to examine how theological concepts are enforced, negotiated, and changed in real-life settings. In this regard, UKIT serves as the main site for understanding how practical theology is conceptualized, taught, and practiced. Data is collected through a variety of methods to ensure triangulation and methodological accuracy. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These include: Document Analysis: curricular documents, syllabus, faculty handbooks, and relevant institutional reports related to practical theology are analyzed to understand how the discipline is structured and positioned within the Faculty of Theology. (Stuerzenhofecker, 2020); Semi-Structured Interview: In-depth interviews are conducted with key stakeholders, including faculty members who teach practical theology, administrative leaders, and recent graduates who have been involved in pastoral or ministry roles. This interview aims to uncover perspectives on the strengths, challenges, and opportunities in shaping competent practical theologians. (Naidoo, 2015) Participant Observation: Researchers participate in selected lectures, field education orientations, and student reflection sessions to gain hands-on insight into the pedagogical environment and dynamics of practical theological training formations. (Naidoo, 2021) Focus Group Discussions: Small group discussions are held with current students enrolled in practical theology courses to explore the subject's perceived experiences, expectations, and relevance in preparing them for ministry. (Stuerzenhofecker, 2023)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents findings from interviews, document analysis, participant observations, and focus group discussions with stakeholders at the Indonesian Christian University Tomohon (UKIT). Data were analyzed using thematic analysis and content analysis to identify patterns in how practical theology is understood, taught, and experienced by students and faculty members.

Word clouds are generated from interview transcripts and student reflection reports to visualize the dominant terms related to practical theology. A larger font size indicates a higher frequency of mentions.



Figure 1. Word cloud shows frequently mentioned terms related to practical theology at the Indonesian Christian University Tomohon (UKIT), based on interview transcripts and student reflection reports.

As shown in Figure 1, participants most often used terms such as "pastoral," "ministry," "ministry," and "visitation" when describing practical theology. This reflects a strong emphasis on functional and ministerial roles rather than reflective or integrative theological practices. In contrast, terms such as "reflection," "context," and "theological integration" appear less frequently, suggesting limited engagement with critical theological inquiry in the field.

The following sections outline the five main themes that emerge from the data:

1. Conceptual Understanding of Practical Theology

Participants described practical theology in a variety of ways. Many faculty members view it primarily as a set of service skills.

"Practical theology helps students apply what they have learned in systematic theology to real-life ministry situations. It's more about doing than thinking."

— Respondent FT-03, Lecturer in Homiletics

"It's not just about doing service; it's about reflecting theologically on our actions and experiences in ministry."

— Respondent FT-07, Senior Pastoral Lecturer

Students also expressed confusion about the peculiarities of the subject compared to other courses:

"We learned how to visit the sick, preach, and organize church programs. Nevertheless, I am not sure if this is different from other subjects such as pastoral ministry or Christian education."

— Respondent ST-05, Third Year Student

"Sometimes I feel like practical theology just repeats what we've learned in other classes, but by example."

— Respondent ST-08, Fourth Year Student

"I wish there was a clearer explanation of what makes practical theology unique."

— ST-12 Respondent, Final Year Student

2. Curriculum Structure and Content

Based on the analysis of the S.Th. Curriculum document, practical courses related to theology consist of approximately 20 credit hours out of a total of 148 credit hours in the Bachelor of Theology program of the Indonesian Christian University Tomohon (UKIT). This corresponds to about 13-14% of the overall theological curriculum.

These courses include:

- Introduction to Practical Theology
- Liturgy
- Homiletics
- Pastoral Theology
- Pastoral Counseling
- Contextual Christian Education
- Learning Evaluation
- Field Education in Religious Teaching
- Formation of Parish Communities
- Spiritual Formation
- Worship Space and Technology
- Ecclesiastical Law and Administration
- Catechesis
- Cross-Cultural Pastoral Services
- Church Music
- Music and Worship
- Field Education Supervision
- Theological Reflections in Ministry

Although this list shows a relatively broader scope than previously assumed, data from classroom observations and syllabus reviews show that many of these courses remain largely skill-oriented rather than reflective or integrative. There have been limited attempts to connect practical theology with basic disciplines such as biblical studies, systematic theology, or ethics.

Faculty members acknowledge that although the number of practical courses related to theology has increased over time, there is still minimal integration across theological fields.

"We have more practical courses now, but they often focus on technique rather than deeper theological meaning."

— Respondent FT-06, Liturgical Lecturer

"Students learn how to preach, visit the sick, or organize worship, but rarely are they asked to reflect theologically on why we do it this way."

— Respondent FT-09, Senior Lecturer in Pastoral Theology

Students also expressed similar sentiments:

"I was expecting more discussion in liturgical class, but we just memorized the order of the service without asking why."

— Respondent ST-03, Third Year Student

"Sometimes I feel like theology practically repeats what we learn in other classes, just by example."

— Respondent ST-08, Fourth Year Student

In addition, the experience of field education, although part of the practical theological component, does not always connect back to theological reflection or classroom learning:

"We had to write a report after our field education, but no one asked us to reflect theologically on what happened."

— ST-10 Respondent, Final Year Student

"Our supervisor said we should focus on doing the job well, not think too much about the 'why' behind it."

— Respondent ST-06, Graduate (2025)

A review of the document shows that most course syllabus emphasizes procedural knowledge, such as conducting services, preparing sermons, or organizing church activities, over formational or contextual theological goals. Very few courses include explicit objectives related to theological reflection, intercultural communication, or mission engagement.

3. Pedagogical Approach and Learning Experience

Classroom teaching remains dominated by lecture-based. While some lecturers try interactive methods, these are rarely applied and inconsistent. Only one course—Pastoral Care—includes role-playing exercises that simulate real-life pastoral encounters.

"Most of the time, we just listen to lectures. We can't practice until we're already on the pitch. By then, it was too late."

— Respondent ST-11, Final Year Student

"I wish we had more case studies or simulations. It will help us think critically about a real service situation before we deal with it."

— Respondent ST-08, Fourth Year Student

"Sometimes the professor reads from a textbook for the whole class. I don't remember anything after that."

— Respondent ST-02, Second Year Student

"There was one class where we practiced visiting someone who was grieving. It helped, but we never did it again."

— Respondent ST-06, Graduate (2023)

The faculty acknowledged the need for innovation but cited constraints such as large class sizes and a lack of training in active learning methods.

4. Education and Field Supervision

Field education is a mandatory component of S.Th program, typically requiring students to complete an eight-week internship at a local church or religious organization. While students report gaining valuable hands-on experience, supervision is inconsistent and lacks theological depth.

"My supervisor gave me tasks like organizing events or leading youth groups, but never discussed my experiences theologically."

— Respondent ST-06, Graduate (2023)

"There is no structure for our reflection. We just did what the pastor told us to do."

— ST-10 Respondent, Final Year Student

"I once asked my supervisor, 'How am I supposed to relate this work to theology?' He said, 'Just do your job well.' That's all."

— Respondent ST-09, Graduate (2023)

"I wanted to write something about how I felt about serving in the village church, but there was no room for that in the report."

— Respondent ST-04, Third Year Student

5. Contextual Relevance and Institutional Ethos

One of the strengths identified was the institution's commitment to contextual theological education. Initiatives such as courses on Minahasa's Christian heritage, the integration of local liturgical practices, and community-based mission projects demonstrate a sincere effort to root theological formation in the reality we live in.

"I love the course on the history of Minahasa Christianity. It helps me understand why people here believe certain things."

— Respondent ST-01, First Year Student

"We sang local hymns in worship classes. It made me feel like theology was part of my culture."

— Respondent ST-13, Fifth Year Student

However, despite the emphasis on this context, there is a limited formal incorporation of indigenous theological resources or participatory methods in the practical theology curriculum:

"We talk about Minahasa culture, but rarely connect it with theology. It feels more like history than theology."

— Respondent ST-04, Third Year Student

"I hope we can learn how our ancestors saw God, not just what Western theologians wrote."

— Respondent ST-14, Final Year Student

"Our church has its own way of caring for the sick. Why don't we learn it in class?"

— Respondent ST-07, Fourth Year Student

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts, observational notes, and curricular documents reveals five main themes that characterize the current state of practical theology education at the Indonesian Christian University Tomohon (UKIT). These themes include conceptual understanding, curriculum structure, pedagogical approaches, field education experiences, and contextual relevance. Table 1 presents a summary of these findings, highlighting the patterns in how practical theology is perceived, structured, and practiced within institutions.

Table 1: Thematic Analysis Findings

Theme	Key Observations
Conceptual Understanding	It is often seen as a set of service skills rather than a reflective academic discipline.
Curriculum Structure	Minimum credit hour allocation; poor integration with the field of basic theology
Pedagogical Approach	Lecture-based instruction dominates; use of limited experience-based learning.
Field Education	Informal supervision; Lack of structured theological feedback
Contextual Relevance	Strong contextual commitment but limited formal integration of local wisdom

Analysis of the Content of Curricular Documents

Analysis of the content of the syllabus and curriculum documents shows that practical theology is often framed procedurally rather than philosophical. Key findings include:

- Learning outcomes emphasize procedural knowledge (e.g., visiting techniques, sermon preparation).

- There is little reference to theological reflection or contextual hermeneutics.
- The evaluation criteria focus on task completion rather than spiritual or theological development.
- Some courses explicitly encourage intercultural communication or mission engagement.

Word Cloud Interpretation

The word cloud provides a visual summary of the participant's description of practical theology. Words such as "pastoral", "ministry", "ministry", and "visit" dominate the visualization, highlighting the strong emphasis on action-oriented theological practice.

In contrast, terms such as "reflection", "context", and "integration" appear to be smaller, suggesting limited engagement with the reflective or integrative dimensions of the discipline. This is in line with student feedback, which suggests that practical theology is often thought of more as a collection of ministry techniques than as a theological sub-field of formation and reflectivity.

Discussion

This study contributes to the growing discourse on practical theology as a reflective and integrative sub-field in theological education, particularly in non-Western and postcolonial contexts. By examining how practical theology is conceptualized, structured, taught, and experienced at the Indonesian Christian University Tomohon (UKIT), these findings reveal promising developments and critical challenges that resonate with broader global trends in theological pedagogy.

This discussion is framed by Richard Osmer's (2008) four assignments on practical theological interpretations – descriptive-empirical, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic – and engages with the latest literature from reputable sources such as *the International Journal of Practical Theology*, *HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies*, and *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies*. This comparative insight places the context of UKIT in international conversations about the formation of reflective theological leaders and missions.

Descriptive-Empirical Task: Understanding the Current State

These findings suggest that practical theology at UKIT is often described in functional terms—such as "pastoral", "ministry", and "ministry"—and is primarily seen as a set of ministry skills rather than a reflective academic discipline. This is in line with observations from Barnard & Juliana (2020), who noted a similar pattern in African theological institutions where practical theology is often treated more as a function of service than as a field that requires methodological depth.

Curriculum documents further reinforce this perception by emphasizing procedural knowledge rather than formative learning. Classroom instruction remains largely lecture-based, and field education experiences are not consistently supervised. These findings resonate with Sudhiarsa (2021) and Tanyid (2025), who report comparable challenges in Indonesian theological colleges, including limited pedagogical innovation and weak integration between theory and practice. (Sudhiarsa, 2021; Taniid, 2025)

However, some faculty members and senior students acknowledge the importance of theological reflection, pointing out that there is an emerging awareness of practical theology as more than just a pastoral technique. This is in line with Bass (2021), who argues that practical theology should be practiced not only as doing ministry but also as *practicing theology*—a process of formation rooted in life experience.

Interpretive Task: Analyzing the Frameworks That Shape Implementation

Different views of practical theology seem to be shaped by several interrelated factors. First, UKIT has historically emphasized doctrinal and exegetical training, which influences how practical theology is perceived and

structured. As Setiawan & van der Ven (2019) and Gener (2018) have observed in Asian theological education, the curriculum often reflects an inherited paradigm that prioritizes cognitive knowledge over formative or contextual engagement. (Gener, 2018; Setiawan & van der Ven, 2019)

Second, the findings suggest that theological education at UKIT continues to be shaped by the dominant educational paradigm that treats theology primarily as propositional knowledge rather than as a living and reflective practice. This approach influences classroom teaching and student expectations, reinforcing the perception of practical theology as a set of ministry techniques rather than as an academic discipline that requires critical theological involvement.

This pattern resonates with the observations of Setiawan & van der Ven (2019), who note that many theological institutions in Asia still operate within a cognitive framework that prioritizes doctrinal transmission over formative learning. Similarly, van der Kooij et al. (2022) argue that such a paradigm hinders the development of reflective practitioners who are able to engage with complex pastoral realities critically. In Indonesian theological education, this issue has been further highlighted by Sosedkov (2022), who calls for a shift towards a missional and integrative model—which sees theology not only as something to be studied but also as something to be practiced and contemplated in a real-life context.

Third, the study also reveals that local churches in the GMIM tradition often emphasize perceived ministry competencies—such as preaching, visitation, and church administration—at the expense of deeper theological reflection. These external expectations seem to influence how practical theology is valued and taught within institutions, reinforcing its instrumentalization as a field that focuses on technical performance rather than theological depth.

This phenomenon does not only occur in Indonesia. Studies in African theological institutions (e.g., Barnard & Juliana, 2020) have shown a similar pattern in which ecclesiastical expectations prioritize measurable pastoral outcomes over reflective theological praxis. Likewise, de Beer (2019), Pieterse (2017), and Schoeman and van der Berg (2016) observed that in post-Apartheid South Africa, clergy were often evaluated based on their functional roles rather than their capacity for theological wisdom or contextual interpretation. (de Bir, 2019; Pieterse, 2017; Schoeman & van den Berg, 2016) This comparative insight suggests that the tension between functionalism and reflection in practical theology is a global challenge, especially in postcolonial and contextually rooted theological institutions such as UKIT.

Fourth, while UKIT demonstrates a commitment to contextual theological education through courses on Minahasan Christian heritage and local liturgical practices, these elements have not been fully integrated into the formal structure of practical theology. As van der Kooij et al. (2022) say, contextual relevance requires deliberate integration across curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, not just symbolic inclusion.

These interpretive insights highlight how institutional, educational, and ecclesiastical frameworks shape the understanding and implementation of practical theology at UKIT.

Normative Task: Evaluating Against Standards

When evaluated against the benchmarks set for practical theology education, some differences become apparent. Practical theology at UKIT is often confused with related disciplines such as pastoral ministry or homiletics, indicating a lack of conceptual clarity. In contrast, international standards emphasize their distinct identities as disciplines that mediate between theological theory and ecclesiastical practice (Sosedkov, 2022).

In addition, practical theology remains less connected to basic disciplines such as theology and systematic ethics, limiting opportunities for integrative learning. This contrasts with the model proposed by van der Kooij et al. (2022),

which advocates practical theology to be embedded throughout the theological curriculum rather than limited to isolated choices.

Pedagogically, teaching continues to be highly lecture-dependent, with minimal use of case studies, role-playing, or reflective exercises. This approach does not meet contemporary expectations for formative and experiential learning, as highlighted by Barnard & Juliana (2020). Similarly, supervision during field education lacks theological depth and structured reflection, a challenge that is also noted in Indonesian theological institutions by Sudhiarsa (2021) and Tripodi (2025). (Sudhiarsa, 2021; Tripodi, 2025)

Finally, despite UKIT demonstrating strong cultural awareness and contextual commitment, indigenous theological resources remain underutilized. Setiawan & van der Ven (2019) emphasize that meaningful contextual engagement involves not only cultural sensitivity but also the active incorporation of local wisdom and communal practices into theological pedagogy. Together, these observations suggest that current practices do not meet global standards for reflective, integrative, and mission theological education.

Pragmatic Task: Proposing Strategies for Improvement

Given these findings, several strategies can improve the formation of competent practical theologians at UKIT. First, there is a need for conceptual reorientation. Practical theology must be clearly defined and distinguished from related areas such as pastoral or liturgical ministry. Faculty development programs can support lecturers in understanding their epistemological foundations and pedagogical goals.

Second, the curriculum should be revised to promote greater integration between basic, normative, and practical theological disciplines. This may involve redesigning course sequences, incorporating interdisciplinary assignments, and embedding theological reflections into field education reports. Such an approach is in line with the model of Sosedkov (2022), which positions practical theology as a connecting discipline that bridges ecclesiastical doctrine, mission, and praxis.

Third, pedagogical innovation is needed to move beyond lecture-based teaching. Active learning strategies—such as case-based discussions, peer supervision groups, and theological simulations—can foster deeper engagement and reflective practice. Research by de Beer (2019) supports the effectiveness of such approaches in promoting adaptive leadership and ethical wisdom.

Fourth, field education must be strengthened through formal supervision and theological debriefing. Osmer's (2016) quadruple model offers a useful framework for reforming field education:

1. Describing what is happening on the ground,
2. Interpreting events theologically,
3. Evaluate them against doctrinal and ethical standards,
4. Develop an action plan for future practice.

Finally, contextual engagement should be deepened through collaborative learning and participatory research involving local communities and church partners. To build on existing strengths, UKIT can incorporate Minahasa theological traditions, encourage community-based theological inquiry, and train faculty in contextual hermeneutics. This will align with the global movement toward the decolonization of theological education and promote culturally embedded theological formation. (Dominiak, 2022; Setiawan & van der Ven, 2019)

Theoretical Implications

This study affirms that practical theology should be understood not only as applied theology but as a methodologically based reflective and methodological field that engages with lived religious experience. This supports

the view that practical theology serves as a mediator between theological theory and ecclesiastical practice, especially in diverse and rapidly changing contexts.

In addition, these findings demonstrate the usefulness of Osmer's (2008) four-task as a framework for analyzing practical theological education. However, they also suggest that this framework may benefit from contextual adaptation, especially in settings where practical theology is still developing as a formal subfield.

Practical and Institutional Implications

These findings offer empirical evidence for reforming practical theological education at UKIT. Meaningful change will require a multi-dimensional approach involving:

- Clarifying the identity and purpose of practical theology,
- Revise the curriculum to promote integration and coherence,
- Improving pedagogical methods to encourage theological reflection,
- Strengthening supervision in the field of education,
- Deepen contextual engagement through customary theological resources.

These recommendations are not only relevant to UKIT but also apply to theological institutions across Southeast Asia and other postcolonial contexts that face similar challenges.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

As with other qualitative case studies, this study has some limitations. Its scope is limited to one theological faculty in North Sulawesi, limiting generalization. Data collection relies heavily on self-reported experiences, which can lead to bias. While efforts have been made to ensure transparency and consistency through peer briefing and triangulation, the background and assumptions of the researcher may have influenced interpretation.

Future research could expand this research in several directions. Comparative studies in various theological institutions in Indonesia or Southeast Asia will help identify common patterns and variations in practical theological education. Longitudinal studies that track graduate development can assess the long-term impact of practical theological training. Participatory action research involving faculty, students, and church leaders can also contribute to jointly developing and testing new models of practical theological education.

Additionally, exploring the effectiveness of certain pedagogical innovations, such as theological simulations or reflective journals, can provide insight into best practices for improving student formation. Further investigation of the integration of indigenous theological resources will also enrich contextual theological education in Indonesia and beyond.

CONCLUSION

This research has explored the formation and development of practical theology as a sub-field within the Faculty of Theology, Indonesian Christian University Tomohon (UKIT). Based on qualitative data collected through interviews, document analysis, participant observations, and focus group discussions, this study reveals the critical strengths and challenges in how practical theology is conceptualized, structured, taught, and experienced.

These findings suggest that while there is a growing awareness of the importance of practical theology in preparing theology graduates for meaningful engagement in the church and society, its implementation remains inconsistent across the curriculum. Many faculty members still see it primarily as a set of service skills rather than an academic discipline with methodological depth. Students also expressed confusion regarding its peculiarities

compared to related subjects such as pastoral ministry or homiletics, demonstrating the need for a clearer conceptual framing and deliberate integration within the broader theological curriculum.

Structurally, practical theology occupies only 8% of the total credit hours in the Bachelor of Theology program, with limited ties to basic disciplines such as systematic theology, biblical studies, and ethics. This fragmentation inhibits opportunities for integrative learning and theological reflection, which are essential for forming reflective practitioners who are able to engage complex ministry realities.

Pedagogically, classroom teaching remains largely lecture-based, with minimal use of experiential or case-based learning strategies. While some lecturers tried interactive methods, these were applied inconsistently. Students express a strong desire for a more participatory and formative teaching approach that will better prepare them for real-life ministry situations.

Field education, although valued as a core component of practical theological training, lacks consistent theological supervision and integration. Most students gain hands-on experience but receive little structured reflection or theological feedback. To improve this component, UKIT should develop formal supervision guidelines and train mentors in theological reflection.

Despite these challenges, the institution demonstrates a strong commitment to contextual theological education. Initiatives such as courses on Minahasa's Christian heritage, local liturgical practices, and community-based mission projects reflect sincere efforts to root theological formation in the realities of life. However, a deeper incorporation of indigenous theological resources and participatory methods can further strengthen the contextual relevance and transformative potential of practical theology at UKIT.

In light of these findings, the reform of practical theological education at UKIT requires a multi-dimensional approach involving:

1. Conceptual reorientation—clarifying the identity of practical theology as a reflective and methodologically grounded discipline;
2. Curricular revision—restructuring the curriculum to ensure greater integration between the basic, normative, and practical areas of theology;
3. Pedagogical innovation adopting active learning strategies that encourage theological reflection and adaptive leadership;
4. Strengthen oversight of field education develop structured theological briefings and mentorship programs;
5. Deepened contextual engagement combining local wisdom, collaborative learning, and participatory research into practical theological pedagogy.

By embracing a more integrated and reflective model of practical theology one that aligns with global standards but remains firmly rooted in local contexts UKIT can cultivate theological leaders who are not only knowledgeable but also thoughtful, adaptive, and spiritually attuned to the needs of their communities.

Ultimately, this study confirms that practical theology, when based on rigorous theological reflection and responsiveness to contextual realities, has the potential to be a transformative force in theological education and ecclesiastical life, not only in Indonesia but in various global contexts.

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