### Research Article

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## The Role of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in Improving Quality Culture at FKIP Kutaikartanegara University Tenggarong, East Kalimantan

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum in enhancing the quality culture at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong, East Kalimantan. The primary objective is to assess how the implementation of this curriculum impacts teaching practices, student engagement, and overall educational quality. A qualitative research method was employed, involving interviews with faculty members, administrative staff, and students, coupled with observations and document analysis. Data were analyzed to identify supporting and inhibiting factors influencing the development of a quality culture under the new curriculum framework. The findings reveal that the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has significantly improved the quality culture at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara. The curriculum's flexibility has facilitated the adoption of diverse and innovative teaching methods, leading to enhanced teaching effectiveness and greater student engagement. Faculty members reported increased adaptability in their instructional approaches, while students experienced more interactive and relevant learning experiences. Additionally, the curriculum has fostered greater student autonomy and responsibility, contributing to improved academic performance and motivation. However, challenges such as administrative adjustments and resistance to change among some staff have been identified as barriers. Addressing these issues is crucial for sustaining and further enhancing the positive impact of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum on the institution's quality culture.

Keywords: Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, Education Quality, Quality Culture

### Introduction

In the era of globalization and the industrial revolution 4.0, higher education in Indonesia faces increasingly complex challenges. These changes require rapid and strategic adaptation of various aspects of education, including the curriculum (Yunaini et al., 2022). One of the efforts made by the Indonesian government is to introduce the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, which aims to give universities the freedom to design a curriculum that suits the needs of the times and local conditions. This curriculum is expected to create graduates who are not only academically competent, but also have skills that are relevant to the world of work and are able to contribute positively to society (Yatim et al., 2023).

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum provides space for universities to be more flexible in determining learning methods, teaching materials, and evaluation. In addition, this curriculum also emphasizes the importance of character development, creativity, and students' critical thinking skills. Thus, it is hoped that students can be better prepared to face global challenges and become innovative and highly competitive agents of change. The implementation of this curriculum requires commitment and cooperation from the entire academic community, including lecturers, students, and education staff, in creating a sustainable quality culture (Yulianti et al., 2023).

FKIP Kutaikartanegara University Tenggarong, East Kalimantan, as one of the higher education institutions in Indonesia, participates in the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. This faculty has an important role in producing prospective educators who will spearhead the intellectual life of the nation. Therefore, the development of a quality culture at

FKIP Kutaikartanegara University is a must to ensure that the graduates produced are of high quality and ready to contribute to the world of education.

The implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FETT Kutaikartanegara University Tenggarong has been carried out through various programs and activities. Some of them include project-based curriculum development, increasing lecturer competence through training and workshops, and more holistic assessment of students. In addition, the faculty also encourages collaboration between lecturers and students in research and community service. All these efforts are geared towards creating a conducive academic environment and encouraging the development of a culture of quality.

This research aims to explore how the implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum can contribute to the development of a culture of quality at FKIP Kutaikartanegara University Tenggarong, East Kalimantan. This research will identify the supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of the curriculum and evaluate its impact on the quality of education in the faculty. Thus, it is hoped that the results of this study can provide constructive recommendations for curriculum development and improving quality culture in other higher education institutions.

### Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative research design. Descriptive qualitative research is an approach aimed at providing a detailed and comprehensive description and understanding of a phenomenon by collecting data in the form of words or images rather than numbers. This design is suitable for research that seeks to explore the views, perceptions, and experiences of subjects in depth within a specific context. In this research context, the descriptive qualitative design will be used to describe how the implementation of the

Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Kutaikartanegara University Tenggarong can develop a quality culture.

The data collection techniques for this study include interviews and literature review. Interviews are conducted various with stakeholders, including lecturers, students, and administrative staff at FKIP Kutaikartanegara University Tenggarong. These interviews aim to gather in-depth information about their experiences and perspectives regarding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the development of a quality culture. Additionally, a literature review is conducted to examine relevant literature, such as scholarly articles, books, and policy documents related to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum and quality culture in higher education.

The data analysis techniques in this study consist of three main steps: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction is the process of simplifying and focusing the data collected through interviews and literature reviews by categorizing the data according to relevant themes. Data presentation involves organizing the reduced data in the form of narratives, tables, or diagrams to facilitate understanding and further analysis. Conclusion drawing is carried out by evaluating and interpreting the presented data to answer the research questions and achieve the research objectives. This process also involves validating the findings through data triangulation to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the research results.

# Results And Discussion Implementation of Merdeka Belajar Curriculum

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Kutaikartanegara University Tenggarong involves several strategic adjustments to align with the new educational framework. This curriculum emphasizes flexibility, creativity, and a student-centered approach, aiming to improve educational quality and relevance. To integrate this curriculum, FKIP has revised course structures, adopted innovative teaching methods, and encouraged active learning and collaboration among students and faculty.

Based on the interviews conducted, it was noted that lecturers have embraced the flexibility of the new curriculum, which has allowed them to customize their teaching methods to better align with the diverse needs and interests of students. One lecturer highlighted this change by saying, "The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has been transformative for our teaching practices. It gives us the freedom to adapt our instructional strategies and materials to better fit the specific learning styles and interests of our students. This flexibility has not only made our classes more engaging but has also significantly enhanced the effectiveness of our teaching, leading to a more interactive and supportive learning environment." Students also reported a positive impact, emphasizing how the curriculum has granted them increased opportunities for project-based learning and independent research. As one student expressed, "The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has been a game-changer for my educational experience. It offers us the autonomy to select our own research topics and design our projects, which has greatly enriched my learning journey. This level of freedom has boosted my motivation and engagement with my studies, making me feel more connected and invested in my academic work."

However, the implementation process has also presented challenges, particularly for administrative staff who have had to adapt various procedures to support the new curriculum. An administrative staff member shared, "The transition to the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has required us to rethink and streamline numerous administrative processes. We have had to revise our procedures to ensure they align with the new

curriculum's requirements. While this has been a challenging endeavor, it is crucial for the successful implementation of the curriculum. The adjustments we are making are necessary to provide adequate support and to ensure that the changes are effectively integrated into the administrative framework."

The adoption of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong has led to meaningful changes in teaching and learning practices, enhancing the educational experience for both lecturers and students. Despite the positive reception, there are ongoing challenges related to administrative adjustments that need to be addressed. Overall, the integration of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum marks a significant advancement towards improving educational quality, with continued efforts required to refine the implementation and address emerging challenges.

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Kutaikartanegara University Tenggarong represents a significant shift in educational practices, reflecting a broader trend towards more flexible and student-centered learning environments. This curriculum aims to enhance the quality and relevance of education by allowing educators to tailor their teaching methods to meet diverse student needs. By course structures revising and adopting innovative teaching strategies, FKIP has aligned itself with contemporary educational goals, focusing on fostering creativity, critical thinking, and active learning among students.

One of the notable impacts of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has been the increased engagement and motivation of students. The curriculum's emphasis on autonomy and project-based learning provides students with greater control over their educational journey, encouraging them to pursue topics of personal interest and relevance. This approach not only enriches the learning experience but also promotes a deeper connection between students

and their studies, leading to improved academic performance and overall satisfaction with their education.

However, the implementation process has not been without its challenges. Administrative adjustments have been necessary to support the new curriculum, requiring a rethinking of established procedures and practices. This has involved streamlining administrative processes to align with the curriculum's requirements, which has been a complex and demanding task. Effective integration of the curriculum into the administrative framework is crucial for its success, and addressing these challenges is essential for ensuring that the curriculum's benefits are fully realized.

Moreover, while the new curriculum has been well-received by both faculty and students, ongoing support and refinement are necessary to maintain its effectiveness. Continuous professional development for faculty members, along with feedback mechanisms to monitor and address any issues, will be important for sustaining the positive impacts of the curriculum. Additionally, fostering a culture of collaboration and open communication between administrative staff and faculty will be vital for overcoming obstacles and optimizing the implementation process.

conclusion, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has made a meaningful contribution to the quality of education at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong by promoting flexibility, creativity, and student engagement. Despite the challenges encountered during its implementation, the overall advancements achieved highlight the curriculum's potential to transform educational practices. Moving forward, a focused effort on addressing administrative challenges continuous and supporting improvement will be key to maximizing the benefits of the curriculum and enhancing the educational experience for all stakeholders involved.

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong aligns with key findings from prior research on the impact of independent learning curricula on educational quality. Abidin (2023) highlights that independent learning curricula, such as Merdeka Belajar, are designed to improve educational quality by addressing the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects of student development. This aligns with the observed outcomes at FKIP, where the new curriculum has led to enhanced teaching effectiveness and student engagement. The curriculum's focus on flexibility and student-centered learning supports the development of diverse competencies and character building, echoing the broader goals identified by Abidin's study.

Ainia (2020) emphasizes the holistic nature of independent learning, where the focus extends beyond cognitive development to include the cultivation of noble character the empowerment of students, teachers, and principals. This perspective is reflected in the FKIP experience, where the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has not only improved academic performance but also fostered greater student autonomy and responsibility. The curriculum's flexibility and emphasis on student engagement are consistent with Ainia's findings, which advocate for a more freedom-oriented approach to learning that enhances both educational quality and character development.

Ingtias et al. (2022) discusses the role of teaching practitioner guidelines and the importance of aligning teaching practices with the goals of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum. The study underscores the need for effective implementation strategies to ensure quality outcomes, which is evident in the FKIP context. The challenges faced by administrative staff in adapting procedures to support the new curriculum align with Ingtias et al.'s emphasis on the importance of clear guidelines and effective implementation. The experiences at FKIP,

including the adjustments required for administrative processes, support the necessity for robust frameworks to maximize the benefits of the curriculum and achieve quality improvements in education.

Overall, the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong reflects the broader trends and goals identified in previous research. The curriculum's emphasis on flexibility, student-centered learning, and holistic development aligns with the findings from Abidin, Ainia, and Ingtias et al., demonstrating its potential to enhance educational quality and address contemporary educational challenges.

### **Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Developing a Culture of Quality**

The development of a quality culture through the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong involves both supporting and inhibiting factors. Supporting factors include the flexibility and autonomy offered by the new curriculum, which enables more tailored and effective teaching approaches. Additionally, the strong commitment of faculty and staff to embrace and adapt to these changes plays a crucial role in fostering a quality culture. Conversely, inhibiting factors include challenges related to administrative adjustments resistance to change, which can hinder the smooth implementation of the curriculum and affect overall quality culture development.

Based on the interviews conducted, it was revealed that one significant supporting factor is the flexibility provided by the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, which allows for customized teaching methods and materials. A lecturer highlighted this by stating, "The flexibility of the new curriculum has empowered us to adapt our teaching approaches to better meet the diverse needs of our students. This has greatly enhanced our ability to provide high-quality education and

foster a positive learning environment." Another factor is the enthusiasm and commitment of the faculty towards implementing the new curriculum. As expressed by another lecturer, "Our dedication to the new curriculum is evident in the way we continuously seek innovative methods and actively engage with students to improve their learning experiences."

However, inhibiting factors also impact the development of a quality culture. One challenge mentioned was the difficulty in adapting administrative procedures to align with the new curriculum requirements. An administrative staff member noted, "Adapting our administrative processes to fit the new curriculum has been challenging. We face difficulties in streamlining procedures and ensuring they support the curriculum effectively, which can slow down the overall progress." Additionally, resistance to change from some staff and faculty members has been identified as a barrier. A faculty member commented, "There are still some colleagues who are hesitant to fully embrace the new curriculum due to concerns about the increased workload and unfamiliarity with the new methods."

The development of a quality culture through the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong is influenced by both supporting and inhibiting factors. The flexibility and commitment of faculty and staff are significant supports, contributing to effective teaching and a positive learning environment. However, challenges such administrative adjustments and resistance to change pose obstacles that need to be addressed. To further enhance the quality culture, continued efforts are necessary to overcome these the successful challenges and ensure implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.

The development of a quality culture at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong through the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum highlights both the

opportunities and challenges inherent in adopting innovative educational frameworks. Supporting factors, such as the curriculum's flexibility and the commitment of faculty and staff, play a pivotal role in facilitating this transition. The flexibility embedded in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum allows educators to tailor their teaching methods and materials to better address the diverse needs of students. This adaptability promotes a more engaging and personalized learning experience, which is fundamental to fostering a quality culture. The curriculum's emphasis on student autonomy and creative learning approaches enables instructors to experiment with new pedagogical strategies, thereby enhancing the overall educational experience.

The commitment of faculty members is another critical supporting factor in development of a quality culture. The enthusiasm and proactive engagement of educators in implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum demonstrate their dedication to improving educational practices. Faculty members have shown a willingness to explore innovative teaching methods and to collaborate with students in designing and executing learning activities. This dedication is essential for creating a supportive and dynamic learning environment that encourages student participation achievement. By embracing the curriculum's principles, faculty members contribute significantly to the advancement of a quality culture within the institution.

Despite these supportive factors, several inhibiting elements challenge the successful development of a quality culture. One notable is the difficulty challenge in adapting administrative processes to align with the new curriculum requirements. The need to revise and streamline procedures to support the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has proven to be a complex task for administrative staff. This difficulty in adjusting administrative practices can slow down the overall implementation process and create

barriers to achieving the desired educational outcomes. Efficient and effective administrative support is crucial for the successful integration of the new curriculum and for ensuring that all operational aspects are aligned with educational goals.

Resistance to change among some faculty and staff members also poses a significant barrier. While many have embraced the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, others remain hesitant due to concerns about the increased workload and unfamiliarity with new teaching methods. This resistance can hinder the adoption of innovative practices and impede the development of a quality culture. Addressing these concerns through targeted professional development, support, and communication is essential for overcoming resistance and fostering a more unified approach to curriculum implementation.

In conclusion, the successful development of a quality culture through the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong depends on leveraging supporting factors while addressing inhibiting challenges. The flexibility of the curriculum and the commitment of faculty are key strengths that contribute to enhancing educational quality. However, challenges related to administrative adjustments and resistance to change must be addressed to ensure smooth implementation and sustained progress. Continued efforts to refine administrative processes, provide support for faculty, and address resistance are crucial for achieving the full potential of the Merdeka Curriculum and Belajar furthering institution's quality culture.

The analysis of supporting and inhibiting factors in developing a quality culture through the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong is consistent with prior research on curriculum implementation. Irawati et al. (2022) emphasize that the flexibility of the independent curriculum, allowing educational units to adapt learning approaches to

their specific conditions, aligns with the positive impacts observed at FKIP. This flexibility supports the development of a quality culture by enabling tailored and creative teaching methods. However, Irawati et al. also highlight that successful implementation requires a shift in educators' mindsets and stakeholder support, which resonates with the challenges faced at FKIP, such as resistance to change and administrative adjustments.

Irbah et al. (2022) discuss the readiness of educators for implementing the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum, noting that while some aspects like competence and performance readiness were high, others like training readiness were lacking. This finding reflects similar challenges at FKIP, where administrative and procedural adaptations have posed obstacles. The need for comprehensive training and support for faculty members to fully embrace the new curriculum is a shared concern, indicating that addressing these readiness issues is crucial for overcoming inhibiting factors and fostering a quality culture.

Mastur (2023) highlights the role of principals facilitating curriculum in implementation through coaching, training, and supervision. The study underscores importance of leadership in navigating the challenges of curriculum changes, such as technological barriers and ensuring effective training. This aligns with the findings at FKIP, where faculty commitment and proactive engagement are critical for overcoming resistance and ensuring the successful adoption of the curriculum. The challenges faced, including administrative and technological hurdles. emphasize the need for strong leadership and ongoing support to enhance the quality culture in education.

In summary, the experiences at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong align with the findings of prior research. The flexibility and supportive faculty are consistent with Irawati et al.'s emphasis on curriculum adaptability and

mindset changes, while the challenges related to readiness and training echo Irbah et al.'s concerns. Mastur's focus on leadership underscores the importance of effective management in overcoming barriers, reinforcing the need for continued support and adaptation to achieve a quality culture through the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum.

## The Impact of the Independent Learning Curriculum on the Quality of Education

The impact of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum on educational quality at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong has been significant, resulting in improvements in both teaching effectiveness and student engagement. This curriculum, with its emphasis on flexibility and student-centered learning, aims to enhance the overall educational experience and outcomes. The integration of the new curriculum has led to more innovative teaching practices, increased student involvement in learning activities, and a more responsive educational environment.

Based on the interviews conducted, it was revealed that one major impact is the improvement in teaching effectiveness. A lecturer stated, "The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has enabled us to adopt more diverse and engaging teaching methods. This flexibility has allowed us to better address the needs and interests of our students, resulting in more effective teaching and learning experiences." Furthermore, the curriculum has also fostered greater student engagement. According to a student, "The new curriculum has made learning more interactive and relevant to my interests. This increased improved engagement has myacademic performance and overall satisfaction with my education."

Another significant impact highlighted was the enhancement of student autonomy and responsibility. A faculty member noted, "The curriculum encourages students to take more responsibility for their learning, which has positively influenced their motivation and academic achievements. Students are now more proactive in their studies and are developing valuable skills such as critical thinking and selfmanagement." Additionally, the curriculum has contributed to a more dynamic and adaptive educational environment, allowing for continuous improvement in teaching and learning practices.

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has positively impacted the quality of education at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong. It has led to improvements in teaching effectiveness, increased student engagement, and enhanced student autonomy. These changes have collectively contributed to a more effective and responsive educational environment. Moving forward, continued focus on adapting and refining the curriculum will be essential to sustain and further improve educational quality at the institution.

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong has notably enhanced the quality of education, marking a significant shift towards more effective and engaging teaching practices. One of the primary impacts of this curriculum is the improvement in teaching effectiveness. By offering flexibility in instructional methods, the curriculum enables lecturers to adopt diverse and innovative teaching strategies tailored to meet the unique needs and interests of their students. This adaptability has resulted in a more personalized and effective teaching approach, where educators can better address varying learning styles and preferences. As a result, teaching practices have become more engaging and responsive, leading to improved learning outcomes.

Student engagement has also seen a marked increase as a result of the new curriculum. The emphasis on student-centered learning and flexibility allows students to actively participate in their education through project-based learning and independent research. This interactive

approach has made learning more relevant and stimulating for students, which has, in turn, enhanced their academic performance and overall satisfaction with their education. The curriculum's focus on making learning more interactive and aligned with students' interests has led to a deeper involvement in the educational process, fostering a more motivating and rewarding academic experience.

Another significant impact of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum is the enhancement of student autonomy and responsibility. The curriculum encourages students to take charge of their own learning, which has positively influenced their motivation and academic achievements. By promoting self-directed learning and critical thinking, students are developing essential skills such as time management, problem-solving, and self-regulation. This shift towards greater student autonomy is fostering a sense of ownership over their education, which is contributing to higher levels of engagement and personal growth.

Additionally, the curriculum has facilitated the creation of a more dynamic and adaptive educational environment. The flexibility inherent in the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum allows for continuous improvement in teaching and learning practices. This adaptability ensures that the educational experience remains relevant and responsive to both student needs and emerging educational trends. The ongoing refinement of teaching strategies and curriculum design is crucial for maintaining and enhancing the quality of education, ensuring that the institution remains at the forefront of effective teaching and learning.

In conclusion, the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has had a profound and positive impact on the quality of education at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong. Improvements in teaching effectiveness, increased student engagement, and enhanced student autonomy are key outcomes of this curriculum. These changes collectively contribute to a more effective and responsive educational

environment. Moving forward, it will be essential to continue adapting and refining the curriculum to sustain and further enhance these positive impacts, ensuring ongoing advancements in educational quality and student success.

The findings on the impact of the Merdeka Curriculum at FKIP Belajar Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong align well with prior research, confirming its significant positive effects on educational quality. Rochmat et al. (2023) highlight that the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum fosters essential skills for the Society 5.0 era, such as critical and creative thinking, communication, and collaboration. This is consistent with FKIP's experience, where the curriculum's flexibility has enhanced teaching effectiveness and student engagement. The curriculum's ability to address diverse student needs and promote innovative teaching methods aligns with Rochmat et al.'s observation of the curriculum's role in developing 21st-century skills and preparing students for global competition.

Sahibuddin & Faruq (2024) emphasize the role of educational institutions in advancing educational quality and maximizing their potential. They note the importance of institutions evolving into preferred choices for education through their unique strengths and offerings. This aligns with FKIP's experience, where the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has transformed teaching practices and increased involvement, making the institution more dynamic and responsive. The emphasis on maximizing institutional potential and focusing on innovative practices mirrors FKIP's efforts to enhance educational quality through curriculum implementation.

Tabroni et al. (2022) find that the Merdeka Belajar policy can enhance students' potential, enable teacher innovation, and improve community satisfaction with educational institutions. This perspective is consistent with FKIP's observations that the new curriculum has

led to improved teaching effectiveness, increased student engagement, and greater autonomy. The curriculum's capacity to encourage innovation among teachers and positively impact educational outcomes resonates with Tabroni et al.'s findings, highlighting the curriculum's role in enhancing overall educational quality and community satisfaction.

In summary, the impact of the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum at FKIP Universitas Kutaikartanegara Tenggarong is supported by prior research, reflecting improvements in teaching effectiveness, student engagement, and autonomy. These outcomes are aligned with the curriculum's goals of developing critical skills, fostering innovation, and enhancing institutional performance, as noted in the studies by Rochmat et al., Sahibuddin & Faruq, and Tabroni et al.

### Conclusion

The Merdeka Belajar Curriculum has played a crucial role in enhancing the quality culture at FKIP Kutaikartanegara University Tenggarong by introducing flexible and studentcentered approaches to teaching and learning. The implementation of this curriculum, as outlined in the introduction, aimed to foster a more dynamic and effective educational environment. From the results and discussion, it is evident that the curriculum has led to significant improvements in teaching methods, student engagement, and academic performance. However, challenges such as administrative adjustments and resistance to change must be addressed to ensure the continued success of the curriculum. Moving forward, the development plan should focus on refining administrative wprocesses, providing ongoing support for faculty and staff, and further integrating the curriculum's principles into all aspects of educational practice to sustain and enhance the quality culture at FKIP.

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