



# Curriculum Policy and Educational Quality Enhancement: Examining the Role of the Merdeka Curriculum in Achieving Excellence Accreditation

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## ABSTRACT

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The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has become a strategic policy for improving educational quality and supporting higher education institutions in achieving Excellence Accreditation. However, empirical evidence explaining how curriculum policy contributes to institutional transformation and quality enhancement remains limited. This study examines the role of the Merdeka Curriculum in enhancing educational quality and supporting Excellence Accreditation in the Islamic Education Management Study Programs at university. A qualitative multiple-case study was employed using semi-structured interviews, participant observations, document analysis, and field notes. Data were analyzed through the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal three major themes: curriculum institutionalization as a strategic governance framework, experiential learning and institutional collaboration as drivers of implementation, and adaptive governance with continuous quality improvement in addressing organizational challenges. The study concludes that effective curriculum implementation requires integrating curriculum reform with governance and quality assurance. It contributes an institutional framework linking curriculum policy, organizational transformation, and excellence accreditation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of high-quality education has become a global priority as nations seek to prepare human resources capable of responding to technological advancement, economic transformation, and global competition (Hutahaeen et al., 2024; Yuliana et al., 2026). Educational quality is no longer assessed solely through academic achievement but also through institutions' ability to develop critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and lifelong learning competencies (Pakpahan et al., 2023). Consequently, curriculum policy has emerged as a

strategic instrument for educational transformation because it shapes learning objectives, pedagogical approaches, assessment systems, and institutional governance. International organizations, including UNESCO and the OECD, emphasize that adaptive curriculum reform is fundamental to strengthening educational resilience and improving learning outcomes (Derouich, 2025; Salim et al., 2025). Therefore, examining curriculum policy is essential because it directly influences educational quality, institutional competitiveness, and sustainable national development.

Despite continuous educational reforms, many countries continue to experience difficulties in translating curriculum policy into measurable improvements in educational quality. Curriculum implementation is frequently constrained by limited institutional readiness, inadequate professional capacity, insufficient learning resources, and inconsistencies between policy expectations and educational practice (Alvero et al., 2026; Nuryana et al., 2026; Trisnawati et al., 2025). Indonesia reflects this broader challenge, as disparities in institutional quality and accreditation outcomes remain evident across educational institutions. Furthermore, the increasing emphasis on Excellence Accreditation requires higher education institutions to demonstrate not only regulatory compliance but also sustainable improvements in governance, learning quality, innovation, and stakeholder satisfaction (Ali & Jamin, 2025; Waloyo et al., 2026). These conditions highlight the need to understand how curriculum policy can function as a catalyst for institutional quality enhancement.

The introduction of the Merdeka Curriculum represents one of Indonesia's most significant educational reforms, designed to promote competency-based learning, institutional flexibility, and educational innovation (Soriano, 2025; Sugeng, 2025). The policy encourages educational institutions to redesign curricula, strengthen Outcome-Based Education (OBE), integrate experiential learning, and expand collaboration with external stakeholders through the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) framework. Nevertheless, implementation remains uneven across institutions because of differences in organizational readiness, curriculum adaptation, leadership capacity, and quality assurance systems (Muslim et al., 2026; Romlah et al., 2025; Satriadi & Attruk, 2026). These varying institutional experiences indicate that the relationship between the Merdeka Curriculum and Excellence Accreditation requires more comprehensive investigation, particularly from an institutional governance perspective rather than solely from classroom implementation.

Previous studies have predominantly examined the Merdeka Curriculum in relation to student-centered learning, differentiated instruction, project-based learning, digital transformation, and teacher autonomy. Other researchers have emphasized the importance of leadership, teacher professional development, and organizational culture in supporting successful implementation. Although these studies provide valuable insights into instructional innovation, they mainly

focus on pedagogical practices and rarely examine curriculum policy as a strategic instrument for institutional governance and educational quality enhancement (Dubey, 2025; Permanasari et al., 2026). Consequently, the relationship between curriculum implementation, quality assurance, and accreditation remains insufficiently explored.

Another limitation of existing studies lies in their methodological orientation, which largely relies on descriptive case studies focusing on teachers' perceptions, classroom experiences, or individual institutional practices. Such approaches provide only a partial understanding of curriculum reform because Excellence Accreditation involves broader organizational dimensions, including leadership effectiveness, curriculum governance, quality assurance systems, stakeholder engagement, graduate outcomes, and continuous institutional improvement (Nadliroh et al., 2025). This study addresses these limitations by conceptualizing the Merdeka Curriculum as a strategic institutional policy that simultaneously influences organizational transformation, quality culture, governance effectiveness, and accreditation performance. In doing so, it extends previous scholarship by integrating curriculum policy with educational quality management and higher education accreditation.

Against this background, this study investigates how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum contributes to educational quality enhancement and supports the achievement of Excellence Accreditation in the Islamic Education Management Study Programs at IAIN Kediri and IAIN Ponorogo. It argues that the effectiveness of curriculum policy depends not only on improving teaching and learning but also on strengthening institutional governance, fostering continuous quality improvement, and aligning academic practices with accreditation standards. Accordingly, this study develops an integrated analytical framework linking curriculum institutionalization, experiential learning, institutional collaboration, adaptive governance, and continuous quality improvement. The findings are expected to enrich curriculum policy and educational quality literature while providing practical recommendations for higher education leaders and policymakers seeking sustainable institutional excellence.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a multiple-case study approach to explore how the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum policy contributes to educational quality enhancement and supports the achievement of excellence accreditation. A qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand the meanings, experiences, and institutional processes underlying curriculum policy implementation from the perspectives of various educational stakeholders. Rather than testing predetermined hypotheses, qualitative inquiry enables researchers to construct

an in-depth understanding of complex social phenomena within their natural settings. The case study design was considered appropriate because it facilitates comprehensive investigation of contemporary educational practices while preserving the contextual characteristics of each institution. Through this design, the study captured the interactions among curriculum policy, institutional governance, quality assurance, and accreditation practices that could not be adequately explained through quantitative measurement alone.

The research was conducted at IAIN Kediri and IAIN Ponorogo, educational institutions implementing the Merdeka curriculum while actively pursuing excellence accreditation. The institution was purposively selected because it represents an information-rich case with substantial experience in curriculum reform and institutional quality improvement. In addition, the institution has demonstrated an organisational commitment to implementing curricular innovation through strategic planning, teacher professional development, learning transformation, and continuous quality assurance initiatives. These characteristics provided relevant context for examining the relationship between curriculum policy implementation and the enhancement of educational quality. The research participants consisted of school leaders, curriculum coordinators, teachers, quality assurance personnel, and accreditation team members who were directly involved in planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating the Merdeka Curriculum. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that each informant possessed extensive knowledge and practical experience related to the research objectives.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, participant observations, document analysis, and field notes. Semi-structured interviews enabled participants to explain their experiences, perceptions, and strategies regarding curriculum implementation and quality improvement. Participant observations were conducted to capture authentic educational practices, instructional activities, leadership processes, and institutional interactions within their natural contexts. Documentary evidence included curriculum implementation plans, strategic planning documents, accreditation reports, internal quality assurance records, meeting minutes, policy documents, and other institutional archives relevant to educational quality management. Field notes were maintained throughout the research process to record contextual information, researchers' reflections, and emerging analytical insights. The use of multiple data sources facilitated methodological triangulation and provided a comprehensive understanding of curriculum policy implementation from different institutional perspectives.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involved selecting, coding,

categorizing, and organizing interview transcripts, observation records, and documentary evidence into meaningful analytical themes, which were subsequently presented through thematic matrices and narrative descriptions to facilitate pattern identification and cross-case comparison. Conclusions were continuously verified by examining relationships among emerging themes, comparing empirical findings with relevant theoretical perspectives, and triangulating multiple sources of evidence to ensure analytical consistency. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability through prolonged engagement, methodological and data source triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, thick description, audit trails, reflexive field notes, and systematic documentation. Collectively, these procedures ensured the rigor, transparency, and scientific credibility of the qualitative inquiry while strengthening the validity and reliability of the research findings.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

#### **Institutionalisation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy**

Institutionalisation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy refers to the process by which the Merdeka Curriculum evolves from a government regulatory mandate into an institutional strategy embedded in academic governance, curriculum management, quality assurance, and organisational culture. Evidence from the two study sites indicates that the policy is no longer implemented merely to comply with national regulations but has become an integral component of institutional transformation aimed at improving educational quality and achieving Excellence Accreditation. This institutionalisation is reflected in curriculum redesign based on Outcome-Based Education (OBE), the integration of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) programs into academic structures, the strengthening of learning outcomes, the expansion of experiential learning opportunities, and the alignment of curriculum implementation with internal quality assurance mechanisms. Consequently, curriculum policy functions not only as an educational guideline but also as a strategic governance instrument that shapes institutional planning, academic innovation, and continuous quality improvement.

The Head of the Department of Islamic Education Management at IAIN Kediri explained that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has fundamentally transformed the department's academic orientation. According to the informant, *"The Merdeka Curriculum is no longer viewed merely as a ministerial policy that must be implemented. Instead, it has become the foundation for redesigning our curriculum, strengthening graduate learning outcomes, expanding partnerships, and preparing the department to achieve Excellence Accreditation. Every academic program is now directed toward continuous quality improvement."* This statement

demonstrates that institutional actors perceive curriculum policy as a strategic management instrument rather than a regulatory obligation. The researcher interprets this finding as evidence of organisational commitment to embedding curriculum reform in institutional governance. Such commitment indicates that curriculum implementation is integrated with strategic planning, academic quality assurance, and long-term institutional development.

Similarly, the Head of the Department of Islamic Education Management at IAIN Ponorogo emphasized that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has promoted organizational innovation beyond classroom practices by integrating Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) and Outcome-Based Education (OBE) into curriculum development to strengthen academic quality, stakeholder engagement, graduate competencies, and institutional readiness for Excellence Accreditation. The researcher interprets this finding as indicating that curriculum policy has evolved from an instructional reform into a strategic instrument of organizational transformation, where curriculum innovation is directly linked to institutional performance and quality assurance. This interpretation is reinforced by field observations showing that both universities had revised curriculum documents, learning outcomes, and semester learning plans, integrated experiential learning and MBKM pathways, and aligned departmental strategic plans with internal quality assurance and accreditation standards. Regular curriculum evaluation meetings, partnership development, and monitoring of graduate competencies further demonstrate that curriculum implementation has become embedded within institutional governance. Collectively, these findings indicate that the Merdeka Curriculum has been institutionalized as a strategic framework integrating curriculum development, academic governance, quality assurance, and accreditation planning, reflecting a transition from policy compliance to sustainable institutional transformation.

**Table 1. Institutionalisation of the Merdeka Curriculum Policy for Educational Quality Enhancement**

| <b>Informant Position</b>               | <b>Interview Excerpt</b>                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Indicator</b>                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Head of the MPI Department, IAIN Kediri | "The Merdeka Curriculum has become the basis for redesigning the curriculum, strengthening graduate learning outcomes, and preparing the department for Excellence Accreditation." | Curriculum institutionalisation through strategic academic governance              |
| Head of MPI Department, IAIN Ponorogo   | "MBKM and Outcome-Based Education are integrated because accreditation now evaluates institutional quality, collaboration, and graduate competencies."                             | Integration of curriculum policy with quality assurance and accreditation strategy |

Table 1 demonstrates that both institutions share the view that the Merdeka Curriculum serves as a strategic instrument for enhancing institutional quality rather than merely fulfilling regulatory requirements. Informants consistently emphasised curriculum redesign, learning outcome development, academic partnerships, and accreditation readiness as interconnected elements of educational quality. These findings suggest that curriculum implementation has shifted from a compliance-oriented approach to an institutional development strategy that improves organisational performance.

### **Experiential Learning and Institutional Collaboration**

The second finding demonstrates that the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is driven by the complementary integration of experiential learning and institutional collaboration. In this study, experiential learning refers to learning activities that enable students to acquire managerial competencies and professional skills through authentic workplace experiences, whereas institutional collaboration denotes strategic partnerships between higher education institutions and external stakeholders to support the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program. Field findings reveal that both the Islamic Education Management Study Programs at IAIN Kediri and IAIN Ponorogo have transformed curriculum implementation from a classroom-centered approach into a collaborative learning ecosystem through the integration of Professional Practice (PLP), internships, teaching assistantships, Outcome-Based Education (OBE), curriculum workshops, and inter-university partnerships. According to the Head of the MPI Study Program at IAIN Kediri, these experiential learning activities bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and professional practice by providing students with direct exposure to educational management environments, thereby strengthening graduate competencies and enhancing the relevance of higher education to labor market demands. The researcher interprets this finding as evidence that authentic learning experiences have become a strategic mechanism for improving educational quality through competency-based curriculum implementation.

Likewise, the Head of the MPI Study Program at IAIN Ponorogo emphasized that collaboration with partner universities, particularly IAIN Kediri, has strengthened curriculum implementation by facilitating academic exchange, curriculum innovation, and the sharing of institutional resources through MBKM and Outcome-Based Education initiatives. The researcher interprets this statement as indicating that curriculum implementation extends beyond internal academic reform toward collaborative institutional governance that enhances organizational learning and institutional capacity. These findings were reinforced by field observations showing students' active participation in Professional Practice (PLP), internships, teaching assistantships, community-

based projects, curriculum workshops, lecturer capacity-building programs, curriculum synchronization meetings, and formal inter-university cooperation agreements. Collectively, the interview and observational findings demonstrate that experiential learning and institutional collaboration function as mutually reinforcing mechanisms that integrate curriculum innovation, graduate competency development, organizational learning, and continuous academic improvement. Consequently, the Merdeka Curriculum has evolved beyond a pedagogical reform initiative into a collaborative educational ecosystem that strengthens educational quality, graduate employability, and institutional excellence.

**Table 2. Experiential Learning and Institutional Collaboration as Drivers of Curriculum Implementation**

| <b>Informant Position</b>                | <b>Interview Excerpt</b>                                                                                                                                                          | <b>Indicator</b>                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Head of MPI Study Program, IAIN Kediri   | "Students participate in Professional Practice (PLP), internships, and teaching assistantships to strengthen managerial competencies and prepare them for professional careers."  | Experiential learning through authentic workplace engagement                             |
| Head of MPI Study Program, IAIN Ponorogo | "Collaboration with partner universities through MBKM and Outcome-Based Education improves curriculum quality, expands academic networks, and accelerates curriculum innovation." | Institutional collaboration supporting curriculum implementation and educational quality |

Table 2 illustrates that both institutions perceive experiential learning and institutional collaboration as complementary mechanisms for implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The first informant emphasizes the importance of authentic learning experiences that expose students to real educational management practices through internships, teaching assistantships, and Professional Practice. These experiences contribute not only to the acquisition of technical competencies but also to the development of leadership, communication, problem-solving, and decision-making skills required in professional educational settings.

### **Organizational Challenges and Continuous Quality Improvement**

The third finding identifies organizational challenges as institutional constraints that influence the effectiveness of the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in supporting the achievement of Excellence Accreditation (Akreditasi Unggul). In this study, organizational challenges refer to structural, managerial, regulatory, and resource-related issues encountered by higher education institutions during curriculum implementation. Field evidence indicates that these challenges are not limited to pedagogical aspects but extend

to curriculum synchronization across study programs, the limited implementation of cross-program MBKM activities, restrictions in student and lecturer mobility, frequent regulatory adjustments, and varying levels of institutional readiness. Despite these constraints, both the Islamic Education Management (MPI) Study Programs at IAIN Kediri and IAIN Ponorogo perceive these challenges as opportunities for organizational learning and continuous quality improvement. Consequently, institutional responses focus on strengthening academic governance, improving internal quality assurance systems, and enhancing strategic planning to ensure that curriculum implementation remains aligned with national accreditation standards.

The Head of the MPI Study Program at IAIN Kediri explained that one of the primary challenges lies in synchronizing the implementation of MBKM across faculties and partner institutions. The informant stated *"Although the Merdeka Curriculum has been implemented, integrating MBKM activities across study programs remains challenging. Differences in curriculum structures, academic calendars, and institutional policies often limit student mobility and interdisciplinary learning. Therefore, curriculum synchronization requires continuous coordination among all stakeholders."* The researcher interprets this statement as indicating that curriculum reform is highly dependent on organizational coordination rather than solely on curriculum design. The existence of institutional differences requires adaptive governance capable of harmonizing academic regulations while maintaining curriculum quality. This finding suggests that successful curriculum implementation requires collaborative institutional management supported by effective communication and policy integration.

Similarly, the Head of the MPI Study Program at IAIN Ponorogo emphasized that regulatory dynamics and institutional readiness remain significant organizational challenges, noting that continuous policy changes require regular adjustments to curriculum documents, quality assurance procedures, accreditation strategies, lecturer capacity, administrative support, and institutional resources to ensure effective implementation. The researcher interprets this finding as evidence that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a dynamic organizational process requiring adaptive governance rather than static policy compliance. This interpretation is reinforced by field observations showing regular curriculum review meetings involving department leaders, lecturers, and quality assurance units, periodic revisions of curriculum structures and learning outcomes, expanded academic partnerships, lecturer professional development, and continuous improvement of quality assurance documentation. Although challenges related to curriculum synchronization, resource allocation, institutional coordination, and administrative adaptation remained evident, both institutions consistently viewed these constraints as opportunities for organizational learning and continuous quality improvement. Collectively, the interview and observational findings demonstrate that

achieving Excellence Accreditation depends not only on curriculum innovation but also on an institution's capacity to strengthen governance, continuously adapt to regulatory changes, and integrate curriculum implementation with quality assurance and strategic organizational development.

**Table 3. Organizational Challenges in Achieving Excellence Accreditation through the Merdeka Curriculum**

| Informant Position                       | Interview Excerpt                                                                                                                                                                                      | Indicator                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Head of MPI Study Program, IAIN Kediri   | "Synchronizing MBKM implementation across study programs remains challenging because curriculum structures, academic calendars, and institutional policies differ, requiring continuous coordination." | Curriculum synchronization and cross-institutional coordination                            |
| Head of MPI Study Program, IAIN Ponorogo | "Regulatory changes require continuous curriculum adjustment, while lecturer readiness, administrative support, and institutional resources must be strengthened to maintain implementation quality."  | Organizational adaptability and institutional readiness for continuous quality improvement |

Table 3 reveals that the organizational challenges encountered by both institutions are multidimensional, encompassing curriculum synchronization, institutional coordination, adaptive governance, and organizational readiness. The findings indicate that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum requires an integrated governance system capable of harmonizing academic regulations, facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration, supporting student mobility, and aligning curriculum implementation with evolving accreditation standards. Frequent policy changes also require continuous revisions of curriculum documents, quality assurance procedures, and accreditation strategies while strengthening human resources, administrative systems, and institutional leadership. These findings suggest that institutional readiness is a dynamic capability developed through continuous learning, strategic planning, and organizational innovation. Consequently, the successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum and the achievement of Excellence Accreditation depend not only on curriculum design but also on institutional adaptability, effective stakeholder coordination, and sustained continuous quality improvement to strengthen long-term organizational resilience.

## Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum has evolved beyond regulatory compliance into a strategic institutional framework for enhancing educational quality and achieving Excellence Accreditation. This finding is consistent with the perspective of Fullan (2020), who argues that educational reform becomes sustainable only when it is institutionalized within organizational culture, leadership, and governance

systems rather than being treated as a temporary policy initiative (Mende & Zumaro, 2025). Likewise, UNESCO (2021) emphasizes that curriculum transformation should be integrated with institutional quality assurance and continuous improvement to create resilient educational systems (Asmi et al., 2025; Hossain, 2025). The present study extends these perspectives by demonstrating that curriculum institutionalization in the Islamic Education Management Study Programs at IAIN Kediri and IAIN Ponorogo is manifested through curriculum redesign, the integration of Outcome-Based Education (OBE), academic governance, and accreditation planning, thereby transforming curriculum policy into an organizational strategy for institutional excellence rather than merely an instructional reform (Mistamiruddin & Nasri, 2024; Mujiburrahman et al., 2025; Salabi & Muharramah, 2026). Theoretically, this finding enriches curriculum policy literature by positioning curriculum institutionalization as a governance mechanism that links educational quality, strategic management, and accreditation. Practically, it suggests that higher education institutions should integrate curriculum policy with strategic planning and internal quality assurance to ensure sustainable institutional development.

The study further reveals that experiential learning and institutional collaboration constitute two interdependent mechanisms that strengthen the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum (Marthawati & Setyo, 2024; Yoto et al., 2024). This finding supports the experiential learning theory proposed by David A. Kolb, which emphasizes that meaningful learning emerges through concrete experiences, reflection, conceptualization, and active experimentation (Setiono et al., 2026). Furthermore, the results align with previous studies indicating that university industry and inter-institutional collaborations significantly enhance curriculum relevance, graduate employability, and educational innovation. However, this study offers an important extension by demonstrating that experiential learning and institutional collaboration are not merely pedagogical innovations but strategic institutional resources that simultaneously improve student competencies, organizational learning, and academic quality ('Azah et al., 2024; Astuti et al., 2024). This integrated perspective contributes theoretically by connecting experiential learning with institutional governance and curriculum implementation within a single analytical framework. From a practical standpoint, the findings imply that universities should systematically expand partnerships with educational institutions, government agencies, and professional organizations while embedding authentic learning experiences into curriculum structures to improve graduate competitiveness and accreditation performance ('Azah et al., 2024; Astuti et al., 2024; Bahri et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2024).

Another important finding concerns the organizational challenges encountered during curriculum implementation. Previous studies generally identify policy inconsistency, resource limitations, and institutional readiness as

barriers to curriculum reform. The findings of this study confirm these challenges but simultaneously reveal a different organizational response. Instead of perceiving regulatory changes, curriculum synchronization, and resource constraints as obstacles, both institutions transformed these challenges into opportunities for organizational learning and continuous quality improvement through adaptive governance, strategic coordination, and strengthened quality assurance systems. This finding is consistent with organizational learning theory, which argues that institutional adaptability is essential for maintaining organizational effectiveness in dynamic policy environments (Ndari et al., 2023; Rokayah et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the present study advances existing literature by demonstrating that adaptive governance serves as a mediating mechanism connecting curriculum reform with institutional accreditation readiness. Consequently, the achievement of Excellence Accreditation depends not only on curriculum innovation but also on the organization's capacity to continuously learn, adapt, and improve its governance systems

Overall, the findings support the argument that successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum is a multidimensional organizational process involving curriculum institutionalization, experiential learning, institutional collaboration, adaptive governance, and continuous quality improvement. Unlike many previous studies that primarily focus on classroom implementation or teacher practices, this research proposes a more comprehensive institutional model that integrates curriculum policy, quality assurance, organizational management, and accreditation within a unified conceptual framework. This integrated perspective represents the principal theoretical contribution of the study by extending the discourse on curriculum policy from pedagogical implementation toward strategic institutional transformation. Practically, the proposed model provides a valuable reference for policymakers, university leaders, and quality assurance agencies in designing curriculum policies that are systematically aligned with institutional governance, stakeholder collaboration, graduate competency development, and accreditation standards. Therefore, the study contributes not only to the advancement of curriculum policy theory but also to the development of evidence-based strategies for achieving sustainable educational quality and institutional excellence in higher education.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum extends beyond pedagogical reform and serves as a strategic institutional mechanism for enhancing educational quality and achieving Excellence Accreditation. The findings reveal that curriculum institutionalization, experiential learning, institutional collaboration, and adaptive governance collectively establish a sustainable quality improvement ecosystem that

strengthens academic governance, graduate competencies, and organizational resilience. These results indicate that excellence accreditation depends not only on compliance with national curriculum policies but also on an institution's ability to integrate curriculum innovation with quality assurance systems, strategic governance, and continuous organizational learning. The study contributes theoretically by proposing an integrated framework that connects curriculum policy, institutional governance, experiential learning, collaborative partnerships, and continuous quality improvement within the context of higher education accreditation. Practically, it offers evidence-based guidance for policymakers, university leaders, and quality assurance agencies in designing sustainable curriculum strategies. However, the study is limited to two State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTKIN) offering Islamic Education Management programs. Future research should investigate diverse institutional contexts using comparative and mixed-method approaches to validate and further refine the proposed institutional framework.

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