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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ADDRESSING THE DISCONNECT: REALIGNING THE ENGLISH CURRICULUM WITH GLOBAL WORKFORCE NEEDS

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Abstract: This study analyses the gap between the English language education curriculum in higher education and the competency requirements of the global job market. Using a mixed-methods approach with a sequential explanatory design, data was collected through questionnaires administered to 20 graduates and 5 industry supervisors, followed by in-depth interviews and analysis of syllabus documents and job descriptions. The results reveal that 80% of graduates feel that the curriculum only prepares them for 40–50% of the skills needed in the workplace, with the largest gaps in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and business communication. The industry perspective confirms that graduates need 6–12 months to become fully productive. Document analysis shows that only 30% of courses are practice-oriented. The study identified three factors determining work readiness: the availability of ESP courses, internship experience in global companies, and international certification. As recommendations, the study calls for the comprehensive integration of ESP (at least 40% of credits), the strengthening of certified internship programs, and the establishment of sustainable strategic partnerships with industry. The implementation of these recommendations is expected to produce graduates who are not only academically excellent but also ready to face the challenges of the dynamic global job market.

Keywords: Curriculum Gap, Work Readiness, ESP, Industry-Education Collaboration.

MENGATASI KETERPUTUSAN: MENYELARASKAN KEMBALI KURIKULUM BAHASA INGGRIS DENGAN KEBUTUHAN TENAGA KERJA GLOBAL

Abstrak: Penelitian ini menganalisis kesenjangan antara kurikulum pendidikan bahasa Inggris di perguruan tinggi dan persyaratan kompetensi pasar kerja global. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan metode campuran dengan desain eksplanatori berurutan, data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner yang diberikan kepada 20 lulusan dan 5 supervisor industri, diikuti dengan wawancara mendalam dan analisis dokumen silabus dan deskripsi pekerjaan. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa 80% lulusan merasa bahwa kurikulum hanya mempersiapkan mereka untuk 40-50% keterampilan yang dibutuhkan di tempat kerja, dengan kesenjangan terbesar pada Bahasa Inggris untuk Tujuan Tertentu (ESP) dan komunikasi bisnis. Perspektif industri menegaskan bahwa lulusan membutuhkan waktu 6-12 bulan untuk menjadi sepenuhnya produktif. Analisis dokumen menunjukkan bahwa hanya 30% program studi yang berorientasi pada praktik. Studi ini mengidentifikasi tiga faktor yang menentukan kesiapan kerja: ketersediaan mata kuliah ESP, pengalaman magang di perusahaan global, dan sertifikasi internasional. Sebagai rekomendasi, studi ini menyerukan integrasi ESP secara komprehensif (setidaknya 40% dari kredit), penguatan program magang bersertifikat, dan pembentukan kemitraan strategis yang berkelanjutan dengan industri.

Implementasi dari rekomendasi tersebut diharapkan dapat menghasilkan lulusan yang tidak hanya unggul secara akademis, namun juga siap menghadapi tantangan pasar kerja global yang dinamis.

Kata kunci: Kesenjangan Kurikulum, Kesiapan Kerja, ESP, Kolaborasi Industri-Pendidikan.

INTRODUCTION

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has triggered a wave of digitalisation and automation that is transforming various employment sectors. New technologies such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and the Internet of Things (IoT) are becoming increasingly integrated into business and operational processes. However, more crucially, this situation demands new skills that can keep pace with technological developments. As a consequence, English language graduates are required to not only have good language skills, but also understand how the language is used in the context of technology and business (Anderson, 2023). Therefore, universities need to be aware of this trend and update their curricula to include technology and digital skills components that are relevant to current industry needs.

Furthermore, the shift towards a knowledge-based economy has emphasised the importance of creativity, problem-solving, and communication skills in English. In this context, English education graduates who are not only academically proficient but also possess practical skills in this field will be better prepared to face global challenges (Brown & Lauder, 2022). Ideally, programs that integrate collaborative projects, internships, and direct industry experience will be highly beneficial (Mahfar et al., 2023). With this approach, students can develop more applicable and relevant skills, as well as gain practical insights that will make them more competitive in the global job market. Furthermore, collaboration between higher education institutions and industry is key to producing graduates who are ready to work and can meet the demands of an ever-evolving market (Moumen & El Mejjad, 2022).

Globalisation has transformed the job market landscape worldwide, creating a need for more specialised and adaptive skills (Knight, 2018). In a more specific context, English language education graduates face new challenges in preparing themselves to meet the demands of global industry. Concerningly, this problem is increasingly felt when existing curricula are not relevant enough to address the needs of a dynamic and complex job market (Masduki et al., 2023). Overall, English has become the lingua franca in various industries, from business to technology. According to Febrianto (2021), around 1.5 billion people worldwide speak English, making it an important language in international communication. Not only that, good English language skills include not only communicative abilities, but also mastery of technical terminology and specialised translation skills (Martinez, 2024). However, many English language education programs still focus on pedagogical and linguistic aspects, without integrating the skills required for the global industry. As Handayani (2020) revealed, English has become an essential skill in the world of work, not only in education but also in various sectors such as business, technology, hospitality, and the creative industry.

In recent years, the debate regarding the relevance of higher education curricula to industry needs has become an increasingly pressing topic. According to Masduki et al. (2023), globalisation has not only affected the world economy but has also changed the way companies operate and recruit workers. As a result, graduates are required to have more specific and practical skills that can be

directly applied in the workplace (Smith & Davis, 2022). Therefore, universities need to respond to these changes by adjusting their curricula to produce graduates who are ready to face the demands of the global job market. In line with this, Moumen & El Mejjad (2022) emphasise that collaboration between universities and industry is becoming increasingly important in producing work-ready graduates. Thus, by forming strategic partnerships with companies, universities can ensure that the curriculum taught is in line with real-world needs. More specifically, internship programs, collaborative projects, and hands-on training in industry are effective ways to integrate practical skills into higher education (Mahfar et al., 2023). As evidence, Prasetyo (2020) mentions that students involved in these practical experiences will have a better understanding of job demands and be able to adapt quickly to a dynamic work environment.

However, despite these efforts, many universities still face challenges in designing a curriculum that balances academic and practical aspects. As noted by Brown & Lauder (2022), one of the main obstacles is the reliance on a more theoretical and traditional approach to teaching. To overcome this, innovation is needed in teaching methods that are more oriented towards practice and real-world application. In this case, project-based and problem-based learning approaches, as well as the use of technology in teaching, can be solutions to create a more interactive learning experience that is relevant to industry needs. According to Anderson (2023), in today's digital age, the ability to adapt to technology is also an important factor in graduate employability. In particular, graduates who can utilise technology to improve efficiency and productivity will have a competitive advantage. For example, the ability to use digital tools in translation, manage projects with management software, or utilise social media for business communication are skills that are highly sought after by companies (Smith & Davis, 2022). Therefore, universities need to ensure that students not only understand the theory behind these technologies but can also apply them practically in a professional context. As a complement, Setiawan (2023) adds that the integration of technology into the English language education curriculum will help graduates become more relevant and prepared to face challenges in an increasingly sophisticated and automated world of work.

As the main institution, higher education institutions, particularly English education programs, play a crucial role in equipping students with the necessary competencies. However, the reality in the field shows that graduates often feel unprepared to face the demands of the workplace. This is reinforced by Damayanti & Setyaningsih (2021) and Nasution (2019), who argue that universities still accustom students to a curriculum that focuses more on teaching and linguistics rather than the practical skills needed in industry. As a result, students tend to learn more about linguistic theory and teaching methods than specific skills relevant to the job market, such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), professional translation, or international business communication (Rahmawati & Suryadi, 2021). This situation means that graduates are less prepared to immediately enter the workforce, which demands more practical English language skills focused on an industrial context. Moreover, with the rapid pace of globalisation, the need for workers who are competent in English in non-education sectors is becoming increasingly urgent (Febrianto, 2021). Therefore, it is important to evaluate the extent to which English Education curricula in higher education institutions are able to prepare students to meet the needs of the global job market.

In contrast, non-formal course and training institutions tend to be faster and more responsive to changes in labour market needs (Irianto, 2019; Johnson, 2022). For example, course institutions such as EF (Education First) offer programs that are more practical and focused on developing skills that can be directly applied in the workplace (Johnson, 2022). More specifically, these programs often include training in technical translation, the use of specific software, and international business communication skills (Smith & Davis, 2022; Martinez, 2024). The main advantage of non-formal courses is their flexibility in adapting the curriculum to the latest industry trends (Setiawan, 2023). In practice, these courses often collaborate with specific companies or industries to design programs oriented towards professional needs, such as English for Business, English for Engineering, or English for Hospitality (Rahmawati & Suryadi, 2021). With this approach, course participants not only gain a theoretical understanding of English but also skills that can be directly applied in the

workplace (Prasetyo, 2020). This is very different from the approach in higher education, which still tends to be theory- and academically-oriented without much integration with industry needs. In addition, many English courses provide international certifications that are more recognised by global companies and institutions. For example, certificates such as IELTS, TOEFL, TOEIC, and Cambridge English are often required for job applicants in various sectors, especially those related to international business and technology. On the other hand, graduates of English Education programs at universities generally do not obtain such certification, so they need to take additional courses to gain recognition of their competencies that are more relevant to the world of work.

Based on this reality, with increasing competition in the global job market, the skills-based approach offered by course institutions has become more attractive to individuals who want to find employment immediately. Therefore, English language education programs in higher education institutions still need to innovate in order to balance academic and practical aspects, so that graduates are not only prepared to become educators or academics, but also have the skills needed in various industrial sectors. According to Brown and Lauder (2022), changes in the global labour market affect the value of education and skills. The real impact of the lack of work readiness of English education graduates has a direct impact on their competitiveness in the global job market. This is in line with Knight (2018), who notes that higher education has an important role in developing skills relevant to the global job market. Evidence shows that companies tend to prefer candidates who already possess specialised skills and are ready to work immediately without requiring additional training. As evidence, Emerging & Trendence (2023) in the Global Employability University Survey found that 74% of large companies want graduates who already have skills that are ready to be used in the workplace. Furthermore, this also affects the image of the educational institutions that produce these graduates. As Tomlinson (2019) observed, higher education qualifications are important for increasing competitiveness in the job market.

Based on the comprehensive description above, it can be concluded that in this era of rapid globalisation, English language graduates face significant challenges in meeting the needs of a dynamic and complex global job market. Therefore, university curricula that tend to focus on pedagogical aspects and linguistic theory need to be adjusted to be more relevant to industry demands. Meanwhile, on the other hand, non-formal course and training institutions demonstrate greater flexibility in responding to changing industry needs by offering programs that are oriented towards practical skills. It is worth noting that cooperation with companies and international certification are the main advantages of non-formal courses, which provide graduates with skills that can be directly applied in the world of work. Thus, an evaluation of higher education curricula is essential to ensure graduates are prepared to compete in the global job market. Based on these considerations, this study aims to explore in depth the experiences of 20 graduates of English language education programs and 5 supervisors in the workplace in order to analyse the root causes of this competency gap. A mixed methods approach with an emphasis on qualitative data was used to formulate a curriculum alignment model that is more relevant to global industry needs.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a mixed methods approach with a sequential explanatory design to investigate the gap between the English education curriculum and global workforce needs. This approach was chosen for its ability to provide comprehensive understanding through the integration of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The first stage was a quantitative survey to obtain an overview, followed by a qualitative stage through in-depth interviews with all participants to explore the meaning and context behind the initial findings.

Data collection techniques included three main methods. First, a closed questionnaire was distributed to 20 graduates and 5 supervisors to measure perceptions of skill readiness and curriculum relevance. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 25 participants for a

comprehensive exploration of each individual's experience (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2018). Third, document analysis of syllabi and job descriptions was conducted to compare curriculum content with real-world workplace needs. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of key stakeholders. The participant group consisted of 20 graduates of English language education programs who were working in global industries, 5 industry practitioners, and instructors from accredited English language course institutions. This smaller, selected sample was deliberately chosen to ensure the depth and richness of qualitative data (Creswell & Poth, 2023). Data analysis was conducted in an integrated manner. Quantitative data were analysed using simple descriptive statistics (percentages and averages). Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis techniques following the Braun & Clarke (2022) model with a process of codification and theme identification. Document analysis used content analysis to map the alignment between the competencies taught and those required.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondent Profile and Identified Competency Gaps

This study, involving 20 graduates and 5 supervisors, revealed that the majority of respondents (16 out of 20 graduates, or 80%) had been working in global industries for 25 years. Initial questionnaire data showed that 16 of the 20 graduates (80%) felt that the curriculum only prepared them for 40-50% of the skills needed in the workplace. This gap was particularly evident in English for Specific Purposes (ESP), where 17 of the 20 graduates (85%) admitted that they did not receive adequate training in technical terminology in their field. These findings are consistent with research by Hikmat et al. (2021), which concluded that the mismatch between graduate competencies and industry needs is a systemic problem, particularly in the mastery of technical English. All graduates (20 people) were then interviewed in depth to understand the root causes of the problem, providing significant narrative depth.

Further analysis shows that this competency gap is consistent across various industry sectors, with variations concentrated on the specific types of skills required. In the technology sector, for example, 15 out of 20 graduates (75%) require technical documentation skills, while in the hospitality sector, 8 out of 10 graduates (80%) working in this sector require hands-on customer service practice in English. This pattern indicates that a one-size-fits-all approach to the curriculum is no longer relevant to the increasingly specialised needs of industry, a finding supported by Sari & Putra's (2022) study on the importance of a differentiated approach to the ESP curriculum.

Graduates' Perspectives: Theory versus Practice in the Workplace

From in-depth interviews with all 20 graduates, a consistent theme emerged regarding the mismatch between academic preparation and job demands. Andi, a 2019 graduate at a technology company, explained: *"I had to learn technical writing independently because the curriculum focused more on linguistic theory. I was not taught at all how to compile progress reports for international clients or API documentation."* This statement is in line with previous quantitative findings and is reinforced by Sari, a 2018 graduate in the hospitality industry: *"The hospitality English material was very limited, even though 80% of my job requires specific vocabulary to handle complaints from foreign guests and explain hotel facilities."* The curriculum's inability to provide authentic work context simulations was also revealed in Pratiwi & Setyaningsih's (2020) research, which found that passive teaching methods greatly contributed to the gap in applied competencies. Not only the material, but passive teaching

Methods were also highlighted. Some participants, such as Ahmad, who works as a content writer, stated that *"class discussions rarely mimic the dynamics of actual meetings or business negotiations, so I lack confidence when I have to present in front of international clients. This shows that the gap also lies in the development of soft skills and confidence in a professional context."* The

experiences of these graduates confirm the urgent need for curriculum adjustments not only in terms of content but also pedagogy. These findings reinforce previous research by Setiawan (2021) on the importance of contextualising English language learning. However, this study reveals a new aspect that the mismatch occurs not only in content but also in assessment methods. A total of 14 out of 20 graduates (70%) stated that theory-oriented evaluation systems (such as linguistic essay exams) were inadequate for measuring their work readiness. This explains why many graduates experience culture shock when they first enter the professional world, where assessment is based on the ability to produce applicable outputs such as proposals, presentations, or technical documentation.

Industry Perspective: The Impact of the Gap on Productivity

The graduates' perceptions were confirmed by the industry side through in-depth interviews with the five supervisors. Mr Toni, Operations Manager at a manufacturing company, explained the real consequences of this gap: *"Graduates need 6-12 months to become truly productive because they have to catch up in business communication. They often do not understand the difference between academic and business English, such as how to write persuasive emails or conduct effective teleconferences."* This phenomenon is reinforced by the findings of Nugroho & Fithriani (2021), who identified that the business communication gap has a direct implication on the decline in the initial productivity of new employees. Furthermore, Ms Dewi, HR Development at a multinational company, provides a comparative perspective: *"We prioritise candidates from certain course institutions because they are equipped with certifications and practical skills that are directly applicable, such as high TOEIC scores or Business English certifications. They come with a 'plug and play' mentality."* In line with this, Mr. Agus, a Project Manager at a technology startup, adds: *"We find that course graduates are often familiar with collaboration tools such as Slack or Trello, and understand agile workflows. This is a significant added value that fresh graduates from formal education programs often lack."*

These comments collectively reinforce the findings on the importance of integrating industry tools and methodologies into the curriculum. From a cost and efficiency perspective, this gap has a significant impact on company productivity. Calculations based on the experiences of these five supervisors show that the additional training investment for fresh graduates reaches 2530% of the total training department budget. This finding is consistent with human capital investment theory, which states that competency gaps have the potential to incur economic costs for both educational institutions and industry, as identified in a comprehensive study by Darmawan & Syafrizal (2022) on the additional training costs for new graduates.

Document Analysis: Evidence of Systemic Misalignment

An analysis of the syllabuses of four universities revealed that only 30% of courses teach practical skills related to the world of work, while 70% are still dominated by linguistic theory. This imbalance becomes even more apparent when compared with an analysis of 50 job vacancies, where 85% require ESP skills but only 25% of universities offer them comprehensively. These findings explain why project-based learning, which is implemented in a limited number of universities, has received positive responses from 18 out of 20 graduates (90%), as expressed by Linda: *"This learning model helped me develop problem-solving skills and the ability to collaborate in multidisciplinary teams, which is very similar to actual working conditions."* The importance of such pedagogical innovation is emphasised in the research by Yulianti & Wardhana (2019), which proves the effectiveness of project-based learning in building work competencies.

A further comparative analysis of course institution curricula shows that 85% of their learning materials are directly related to workplace competencies. The flexibility to update materials every six months is a key factor in making course institution graduates more work-ready. These findings confirm Irianto's (2017) study on the agility of non-formal institutions in responding to changes in the job market, while also highlighting systemic weaknesses in the curriculum

development mechanisms in higher education institutions, which tend to be bureaucratic and slow to adapt.

Determining Factors and Integrative Solutions

Based on a synthesis of all preliminary quantitative and qualitative data and document analysis, this study identified three determining factors of work readiness that were most frequently mentioned and had the most significant impact according to participants, namely: 1) the availability of ESP courses, 2) internship experience in global companies, and 3) possession of international certification. These factors consistently emerged in interviews with graduates and supervisors, and were supported by questionnaire data and document analysis. The importance of these three pillars is in line with the findings of Wijaya et al. (2020), whose research concluded that an ESP curriculum designed in collaboration with industry, combined with structured internship experience, significantly improves employability.

As stated by Dr. Fitri, a senior academic: *"We recognise the need to involve industry in curriculum development, but sustainable mechanisms remain a challenge. Often, collaboration only takes the form of sporadic guest lectures, rather than structural involvement in curriculum review."* On the other hand, the openness of industry to collaborate, as expressed by Mr. Robert, one of the supervisors: *"We are open to partnerships in guest lectures, internship programs, and curriculum development, because this is an investment in creating a talent pipeline that suits our needs,"* provides a real opportunity to address the gaps identified in this study. Such synergy is essential, as emphasised in Suryanto & Hidayat's (2021) study on the link and match model, which found that internship programs formally integrated with the curriculum can reduce graduates' work orientation period by up to 50%.

These findings on determining factors provide an empirical basis for the development of an integrative model in curriculum design. The proposed model integrates these three factors into a sustainable framework that involves all stakeholders. Implementing this model requires a systemic change approach that not only changes the curriculum content but also the mindset and academic culture in viewing the relationship between higher education and the world of work. The success of an integrative model also depends heavily on the recognition of competency certification, an aspect raised by Lestari & Pratama (2022), who confirmed that graduates with internationally recognised industry certification have greater bargaining power and shorter job waiting times than those without.

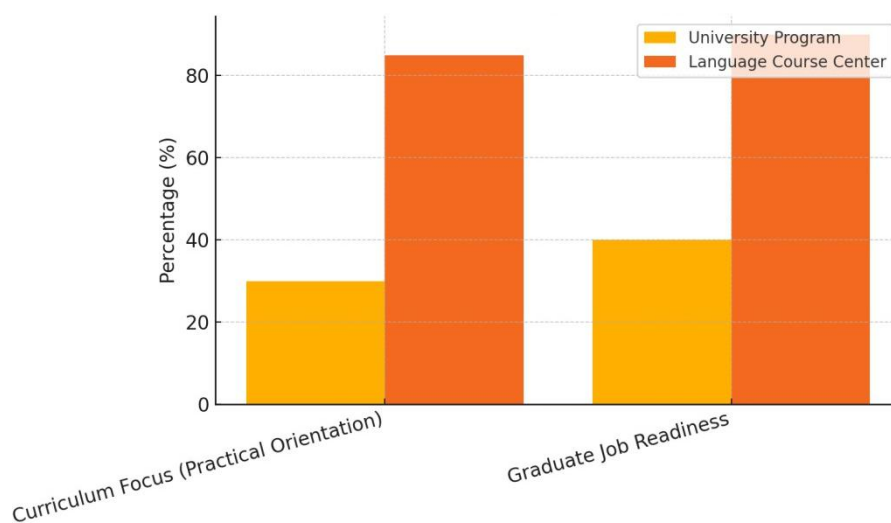


Figure 1.
Comparative Chart: University vs. Language Course Center

Implications for Future Curriculum Development

These interrelated findings lead to three key recommendations for curriculum development. First, a more comprehensive integration of ESP with a minimum portion of 40% of the total credits, referring to findings about the magnitude of specific competency gaps. This recommendation is in line with the research by Purnomo & Sari (2023), which confirms that allocating 40-50% of the curriculum to ESP has been proven to be significant in improving graduates' professional communication skills. Second, the addition of elective courses that focus on practical skills development, responding to the needs expressed by both graduates and industry. This strategy is supported by the findings of Kusumawardani & Setiawan (2022), which state that a variety of elective courses based on practical competencies can reduce the theory-practice gap by up to 35%. Third, strengthening industry immersion through certified internships and collaborative projects, as an implementation of the openness to collaboration expressed by industry practitioners. Harahap et al. (2023) found in their research that structured certified internship programs increase graduates' adaptability in the workplace by 60% compared to conventional internships.

These steps are expected to address the challenge of graduate work readiness that has been consistently revealed in all research graduates. The implementation of these recommendations requires a paradigm shift in higher education management. As stated by Tomlinson (2008) and Knight (2013), higher education needs to shift from knowledge transmission to knowledge creation oriented towards competency development. This transformation is not only about changing the curriculum, but also about building a learning ecosystem that is capable of responding to the dynamics of change in the world of work in a more agile and adaptive manner. The importance of an agile approach in curriculum development is emphasised by Nasution & Fauzi (2021), who introduced an agile curriculum development model to respond to disruptive challenges in the era of industry 4.0. Furthermore, the development of a holistic learning ecosystem as recommended is reinforced by the study by Damayanti & Wijaya (2023) on sustainable education, which emphasises the need for the synergistic integration of the three pillars of higher education with industry needs, thereby narrowing the gap between the academic and professional worlds.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on a comprehensive analysis conducted through a mixed methods approach with an emphasis on qualitative depth, this study concludes that there is a significant gap between the English language education curriculum in higher education and global workforce needs. The research findings reveal that 16 out of 20 graduates (80%) feel that they have only acquired 40 to 50% of the skills needed in the world of work, with the largest gap lying in the mastery of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and business communication skills. Curriculum document analysis reinforced these findings, showing that only 30% of courses were practice-oriented, while 70% were still dominated by a theoretical approach. This situation was exacerbated by the industry perceptions of the five supervisors, who stated that graduates needed 6-12 months to reach the expected level of productivity.

This study also successfully identified three key factors that determine graduate work readiness based on an in-depth analysis of participant experiences, namely the availability of ESP courses, internship experience in global companies, and international certification. Qualitative findings consistently reveal that the mismatch occurs not only at the content level, but also in learning methods and evaluation systems that still lack practical aspects in a professional context, such as the use of modern collaboration tools and authentic business situation simulations.

The implications of this study recommend the need for a paradigm shift in the development of English language education curricula, which includes comprehensive integration of ESP (at least 40% of total credits), strengthening of certified internship programs, and the formation of strategic partnerships with industry. Sustained collaboration between academics and industry practitioners is key to creating a feedback mechanism that can respond dynamically to changing labour market needs. With the implementation of these recommendations, it is hoped that graduates will not only master academic competencies but also have optimal work readiness to face the challenges of the global industry.

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