



ENHANCING THE NATIONAL COMPETENCY TEST: STRATEGIC APPROACHES TO ELEVATE THE QUALITY OF HEALTH SCIENCE GRADUATES

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Abstract

Students represent a crucial resource for higher education institutions, carrying immense potential to contribute to a wide range of academic fields. As the demand for highly skilled graduates intensifies, particularly within health education, the Indonesian government has introduced policies focused on improving educational quality through a comprehensive quality assurance framework. A key component of this initiative is the introduction of the National Competency Examination (UKN), designed to ensure that graduates in health fields such as nursing, midwifery, and medicine meet national competency standards and are well-prepared to compete in the global job market. This research takes a qualitative approach, focusing on the implementation of Competency Tests for nurses and midwives, with study locations covering Regional IV in Makassar and Regional II in Jakarta, providing a descriptive analysis of the findings. The results reveal that, the implementation of the UKN has not yet reached the desired level of success. Challenges such as insufficient commitment from implementers and financial constraints have hindered the effective delivery of the National Competency Examination in the health education sector.

Keywords: Policy, Student, Health, Competency Test

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INTRODUCTION

Health development in Indonesia represents a critical and strategic national effort that aims to ensure the well-being of its population. As mandated by Law Number 36 of 2009 concerning Health, this initiative involves all sectors of society in fostering awareness, willingness, and the ability to adopt healthy living practices. The ultimate goal is to achieve optimal public health status, a target that is contingent upon a well-functioning health system supported by competent human resources, particularly health professionals (Indonesia, 2009). These health professionals are expected to possess a minimum of a Diploma III-level education, except for medical personnel, as stipulated by Law Number 36 of 2014 concerning Health Workers, specifically in Article 9. This requirement ensures that health workers are adequately qualified to provide competent and effective service to the community (Indonesia, 2014a).

However, the global integration of economies, particularly through the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015, has presented new challenges for Indonesia. The AEC opens up regional labor markets, which now include opportunities for Indonesian workers, including those in the health sector, to compete with professionals from other ASEAN countries. This new competitive landscape, while offering opportunities, also exposes weaknesses in the competitiveness of Indonesian health workers, particularly when compared to their counterparts in countries like Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand, where labor quality in the health sector is often perceived to be higher. In response to this challenge, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, introduced the National Competency Test program. This initiative aims to elevate the quality of health-related higher education by ensuring that graduates meet national standards for professional competency. The program serves as an independent assessment tool, guided by competency standards, which directly impacts the quality and readiness of health professionals entering the workforce (Nurhayati, 2022).

The importance of competency testing is enshrined in Article 61, Paragraph 3 of Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System (Indonesia, 2003). This law is further supported by Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education (Indonesia, 2012), which emphasizes that such tests are necessary to

obtain a nationally recognized certification of competency. To operationalize these requirements, the Directorate General of Higher Education has issued Circular Letters No. 704/E.E3/DT/2013 and No. 370/E.E3/DT/2014, which mandate the implementation of national competency tests for prospective graduates in midwifery and nursing programs. Additionally, Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture Number 12 of 2016 outlines the procedures for conducting national competency tests for students in health-related fields (Indonesia, 2016). These efforts are designed to ensure that graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to meet the demands of the healthcare industry, both locally and internationally.

The objectives of these competency tests are multi-faceted. First, they ensure that graduates of health education programs possess standardized national competencies. Second, they assess the mastery of critical knowledge and practical skills, which form the foundation of professional practice in the health sector. Third, they foster a culture of lifelong learning, encouraging graduates to continuously improve their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Lastly, these tests aim to support safe and effective patient care by ensuring that health professionals are well-prepared to handle the challenges of modern healthcare. The national competency tests are designed to assess three core areas: knowledge, practical skills, and professional behavior, in accordance with Law Number 36 of 2014 and Law Number 38 of 2014 (Indonesia, 2014a, 2014b). However, despite their comprehensive framework, the implementation of these tests has often emphasized the theoretical knowledge aspect, which is concerning. Given that the competencies required for effective health practice also include hands-on skills and professional ethics, the narrow focus on knowledge may result in gaps in training that could impact the quality of health services provided by graduates.

M. Nasir, the former Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education, has pointed out that the national competency tests are expected to reduce disparities in the quality of health education graduates across the country. Despite these efforts, the tests are not only aimed at enhancing educational standards but also at creating a standard for the registration and licensing of health professionals (Novia & Putri, 2016). In this context, the issuance of a Certificate

of Competency through these national tests is a critical requirement for obtaining a Registration Certificate (STR), as stipulated by Law Number 36 of 2014 concerning Health Workers (Indonesia, 2014a). The STR serves as the official recognition for health workers to practice their profession in Indonesia, with different regulatory bodies overseeing various health professions. For example, the Indonesian Medical Council issues STRs for doctors, dentists, and pharmacists, while other health professionals are regulated by the Indonesian Health Workers Council (MTKI). These certificates are valid across the country; however, as Indonesia navigates the challenges of globalization, it becomes apparent that the recognition of Indonesian health workers' competencies must extend beyond national borders (Gunawan & Helvis, 2023).

To address these international challenges, the government must undertake strategic policy adjustments that enhance the global recognition of Indonesian health workers' competency certifications. This could involve updating curricula, strengthening competency-based training programs, and fostering international collaborations in health education. Achieving global standardization of competency certification is essential for ensuring that Indonesian health professionals are equipped to compete on the international stage (Gunawan & Helvis, 2023; Handayani et al., 2024). Furthermore, efforts to improve the quality of health education in Indonesia also include the implementation of the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI), mandated by Law Number 12 of 2012. This system aims to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of educational processes, ensuring that graduates possess competencies that align with both national and international standards.

The government has made continuous efforts to enhance the quality of higher education in the health sector, particularly through revising policies that govern student competency assessments. A significant policy shift was the replacement of Permenristekdikti Number 12 of 2016, which outlined the procedures for conducting competency tests for health students, with Permendikbud Number 2 of 2020. This revision introduced several key changes, notably in the allocation of the National Competency Test graduation assessment criteria. According to this new regulation, graduation is now determined by a composite score, with 60% derived from academic performance and 40% from the

competency test results (Kemendikbud, 2020). This policy adjustment is strategically aimed at enhancing the flexibility and adaptability of the assessment system, aligning it more closely with the evolving landscape of higher education in the health field.

By incorporating a more balanced approach between academic achievement and practical competency, the policy seeks to ensure that the competency assessment process is not only more effective and efficient but also remains rigorous in upholding high standards of accountability and quality. Furthermore, the underlying objective of this change is to foster the development of health professionals who possess not only the theoretical knowledge required for their respective fields but also the practical competencies essential for their professional roles. The revised policy encourages a more integrated assessment model, whereby students are evaluated not only on their academic knowledge but also on their ability to translate that knowledge into real-world practice, thereby ensuring that graduates are equipped with both the intellectual and practical skills necessary to succeed in a dynamic healthcare environment.

Despite the various initiatives and policies put in place, challenges persist. Data from the field reveals that a significant number of health education graduates still fail to meet the expected competency standards. This shortfall leads to suboptimal health services, which in turn affects the public's access to high-quality healthcare. The gap between the demand for quality health services and the capacity of health workers to provide them underscores the need for further strengthening of the education and training systems. Graduates must be equipped not only with theoretical knowledge but also with practical skills and professional attitudes that are relevant to the needs of the workforce (Martini et al., 2022).

In this regard, competency tests play a crucial role as a mechanism for assessing the preparedness of health education graduates to enter the workforce. By comprehensively evaluating knowledge, skills, and behavior, competency tests can help identify weaknesses in the education system and serve as the basis for curriculum improvements. The government, through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, must continue to monitor the implementation of these competency tests and provide effective feedback to educational institutions. This feedback loop will help to ensure

that the education and training of future health workers remain responsive to the evolving demands of the health sector, both in Indonesia and globally. By focusing on improving the quality of education and the competencies of health workers, Indonesia can enhance the effectiveness of its healthcare system and ensure that its professionals are capable of meeting the health needs of the population in an increasingly competitive global environment (Martini et al., 2022; Utomo et al., 2022).

METHODS

This study falls under the category of qualitative research, designed to explore and understand phenomena in a comprehensive and in-depth manner, drawing on the lived experiences of the research participants. Qualitative research employs a descriptive approach, focusing on the presentation and interpretation of facts and situations within their natural context. Qualitative research aims to gain a deep understanding of phenomena by observing them directly, analyzing them thoroughly, and conveying data in the form of descriptive words that reflect the real-world conditions in which the phenomena occur. This research specifically concentrates on collecting detailed, real-life information, identifying relevant problems, and evaluating practices that are currently in use, all while adhering to a systematic, descriptive approach (Sugiyono, 2018).

This study is grounded in post-positivism, a philosophical stance that prioritizes examining research subjects within their natural environment. The researcher plays a central role as the primary instrument for data collection, utilizing triangulation techniques to integrate various sources of information. The data analysis process follows an inductive approach, focusing on interpreting meaning rather than generalizing findings. This approach allows for a rich, contextual understanding of the issues under investigation (Sugiyono, 2018). The aim of the research is to uncover the challenges and opportunities surrounding the Competency Test's implementation, particularly regarding nursing and midwifery education quality. The findings are expected to offer strategic recommendations to enhance graduates' readiness for the Competency Test and help them obtain the STR, which is essential for professional practice in healthcare.

The research specifically examines the implementation of Competency Tests for nurses

and midwives, with the research locations spanning across Regional IV in Makassar and Regional II in Jakarta. In Makassar, the study includes the Regency Nursing Academy in Bau-Bau, Permata Bunda Midwifery Academy in Kendari, and STIKES Muhammadiyah Makassar. In the Jakarta area, the research covers institutions in Central Java and Yogyakarta, such as STIKES Karya Husada and STIKES Guna Bangsa Yogyakarta. Informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that chooses participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. Key informants in this study include leaders from health education institutions, such as the Chairperson of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang and the Director of Pelita Ibu Midwifery Academy Kendari, among others. Additionally, the study includes graduates who failed the Competency Test and thus did not obtain a Registration Certificate (STR).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students serve as a cornerstone of every university, representing the primary resource for advancing knowledge and innovation across diverse scientific disciplines. Their potential development aligns with the overarching objectives of higher education, as outlined in the Republic of Indonesia Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education. This legislation underscores the responsibility of universities to produce not just graduates but individuals who are highly qualified and capable of contributing meaningfully to their respective fields. The quality of graduates, therefore, becomes a critical metric for evaluating how effectively higher education institutions in Indonesia can drive national progress, particularly by fostering a skilled workforce ready to address the evolving demands of various sectors.

In response to the growing need for competent graduates, particularly in health-related fields, the Indonesian government has implemented a comprehensive quality assurance system aimed at improving the standards of education. Central to this initiative is the introduction of national competency tests, which are designed to verify that health education graduates possess the necessary skills and knowledge to meet established professional standards. These tests serve not only as a benchmark for competency but also as a mechanism to minimize disparities in the quality of graduates emerging from thousands of health-

related study programs across the country (Martini et al., 2022).

Several health professions, including medicine, dentistry, nursing, midwifery, and pharmacy, have already adopted national competency tests. The goal is to achieve uniformity in the qualifications of graduates from diverse institutions, ensuring that they are well-prepared to fulfill their professional responsibilities with integrity and expertise. Beyond standardization, these tests aim to establish a robust foundation for health workers, enabling them to perform their duties with a high degree of accountability and professionalism (Gruppen et al., 2012). However, the effective implementation of national competency tests requires careful attention to several factors by educational institutions. Institutions must ensure adequate preparation of students, provide access to necessary resources, and address systemic challenges that may hinder the equitable administration of these tests (Rahayu et al., 2021; Sidik, 2020).

Research findings highlight that while the competency tests have contributed significantly to enhancing the quality of health graduates, challenges such as varying levels of institutional commitment, logistical constraints, and disparities in access to resources still persist. Addressing these challenges is crucial to optimizing the role of competency tests in elevating the standards of health education and ensuring that graduates are not only nationally competitive but also globally relevant. Based on the results of research that has been conducted, there are at least five aspects that must be considered, including:

1. Understanding the Objectives of the National Competency Test

Most health education institutions in Indonesia recognize that the National Competency Test (UKN) serves as a critical mechanism for maintaining and enhancing the quality of health worker graduates. This awareness underscores the collective understanding of the necessity for standardized evaluation tools in preparing competent and competitive professionals for the workforce (Hidayat et al., 2024). The Chairperson of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang highlighted this perspective, emphasizing that his institution views the UKN as a strategic initiative to uphold graduate quality. Beyond its role as an academic assessment tool, the UKN is regarded as an

essential instrument to ensure that graduates meet nationally recognized competency standards.

Similarly, the Director of AKBID Pelita Ibu Kendari in Southeast Sulawesi described the UKN as a pivotal tool for producing highly qualified professionals capable of thriving in a competitive job market. According to him, the UKN not only evaluates students' technical skills but also prepares them to navigate the challenges of a dynamic and ever-evolving healthcare landscape. This perspective reflects the broader understanding that the UKN is integral to equipping students for real-world demands.

Echoing these sentiments, the Head of STIKES Muhammadiyah Sidrap emphasized that this collective awareness is widely embraced within his institution. He views the UKN as a fundamental step in developing skilled, dependable health workers who align with societal needs and the healthcare industry's expectations. These insights demonstrate that the UKN is not merely a test but a strategic framework for ensuring that health education graduates possess the necessary competencies to excel professionally, adapt to industry shifts, and contribute meaningfully to public health outcomes.

"...institutions are well aware that the National Competency Test is held to maintain the quality of health worker graduates..." (Chairman of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang)

"...because here we have a clear goal in carrying out this national competency test because we want to guarantee the quality of health worker graduates..." (Director of AKBID Pelita Ibu Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi)

"...most members in our institution have understood the objectives to be achieved in the implementation of the national competency test, namely that this competency test can make quality output..." (Head of Stikes Muhamadiyah Sidrap)

While the purpose of the National Competency Test (UKN) is broadly understood and acknowledged, its implementation faces several significant challenges, particularly regarding the difficulty level of the exam. A graduate of STIKES Guna Bangsa Yogyakarta who failed the UKN expressed that, despite recognizing its objectives, the execution of the test remains suboptimal. He attributed the obstacles to achieving satisfactory results to insufficient preparation and inefficiencies within the implementation system. This underscores a gap between the intended purpose of the UKN and its practical application. Similarly, the Director of AKPER Pemkab Buton emphasized that the high difficulty level of the exam serves as a major barrier for students attempting to pass. This challenge highlights the necessity for targeted interventions to better support students. Providing intensive guidance, enhancing preparatory programs, and ensuring access to more comprehensive and relevant exam materials are critical steps to address these issues.

"...I think most of these health sector institutions have clearly understood what the purpose of holding competency tests is, because it is clearly written in the applicable law, but still to achieve these goals cannot be maximized..." (Graduate of Stikes Guna Bangsa Yogyakarta)

"...the obstacles in taking the competency test are very heavy because many do not pass..." (Director of AKPER Pemkab Buton)

The above statement underscores the critical importance of a thorough understanding of the purpose of the National Competency Test (UKN) among all stakeholders, including education administrators, examiners, and students. UKN is not merely a tool for assessing technical competencies, it also serves to ensure that graduates are equipped to perform their roles in the health sector with professionalism and adherence to high standards. This shared understanding is pivotal in fostering synergy between educational institutions, students, and

national policies aimed at producing competent and reliable health workers.

2. Human Resources

The success of the National Competency Test (UKN) heavily relies on robust resource support, particularly human resources, which are critical in determining the quality of both its processes and outcomes. Insights from various institutions underscore that the readiness of human resources both in terms of quantity and competency has emerged as a key strength in facilitating the effective implementation of this policy (Zayu et al., 2024). The Chairperson of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang highlighted that sufficient and capable human resources form the cornerstone of UKN's success. Similarly, the Director of AKBID Pelita Ibu Kendari and the Director of AKPER Pemkab Buton affirmed that their implementation teams meet the required quality and quantity standards. The Head of STIKES Muhammadiyah Sidrap further emphasized the essential role of professionalism in ensuring that tasks are carried out in compliance with established regulations. Most informants shared the view that human resources posed no significant obstacles, reflecting strong confidence in the readiness and competence of the implementing teams.

"...yes so far the human resources are sufficient to support the implementation of the national competency test..." (Head of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang)

"...many factors support human resources in carrying out competency tests and currently the number of human resources is sufficient..." (Director of AKBID Pelita Ibu Kendari, Southeast Sulawesi)

"...The existing human resources or you could say the competency test implementation committee is quite adequate in terms of quantity and quality..." (Director of AKPER Pemkab Buton)

"...is sufficient and they have the appropriate competence..."
(Head of STIKES Muhammadiyah Sidrap)

While human resources are deemed sufficient for implementing the National Competency Test (UKN), significant challenges remain in achieving optimal outcomes. The Chairperson of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang noted that support personnel, such as Site Supervisors (PJL) and Local Supervisors (PL), primarily focus on technical duties and have limited impact on student graduation rates. This indicates a gap in the strategic utilization of human resources, particularly in areas beyond technical administration. To address this, a more holistic approach to human resource development is necessary one that extends beyond operational roles to include mentorship, enhanced pedagogical methods, and a comprehensive framework for both technical and non-technical support.

"...there are, namely PJL (Site Supervisor) and PL (Local Supervisor), but they cannot optimally strive for student graduation, because their work area is only in the technical implementation..." (Head of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang)

Overall, the success of UKN hinges significantly on key resources, such as qualified teaching staff, examiners, and robust support facilities. The preparedness of human resources considering factors like quantity, quality, and competence serves as a crucial asset for the effective implementation of this policy. However, to attain more optimal outcomes, a broader, more integrated approach is necessary

3. Attitudes of National Competency Test Implementers

The attitude of policy implementers plays a crucial role in the effective execution of the National Competency Test (UKN). To ensure success, implementers must thoroughly understand their responsibilities, possess sufficient skills, and demonstrate unwavering commitment. Their attitude encompasses their response to the policy, depth of understanding, and alignment with value preferences that drive implementation (Malkab et al., 2015; Sayuti,

2017). Interviews with various informants reveal notable differences in the attitudes of UKN implementers. For instance, the head of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang observed that the implementers largely adhered to regulations and commended their integrity, which was bolstered by the signing of an integrity pact. He described this step as an important foundation for maintaining accountability, stating, *"The implementers must have been well prepared, including the integrity pact signed."* This reflects the institution's readiness to support smooth implementation processes. However, he also highlighted variations in implementers' commitment levels, which can present challenges. While strong commitment fosters efficient implementation, a lack of dedication can obstruct the achievement of desired goals.

Conversely, a graduate of STIKES Guna Bangsa who failed the UKN shared a contrasting perspective. He criticized the implementers for their rigidity and lack of responsiveness to system evaluation and improvement needs. He remarked, *"We have sued the Constitutional Court, but until now, there has been no follow-up."* This feedback highlights the need for systematic improvements in UKN implementation, particularly to address the challenges faced by test takers. The inconsistency in implementers' commitment emerges as a significant barrier. A lack of initiative or resistance to improving the system indicates the need for a more thorough evaluation of the implementation process. While some implementers demonstrate high levels of dedication, enabling the process to align with regulations, challenges such as rigid attitudes and a lack of innovation hinder progress.

4. Inter-Organizational Communication

Effective communication serves as a cornerstone for successful policy implementation. In the context of the National Competency Test (UKN), communication transcends the mere delivery of information, functioning as a strategic tool to harmonize understanding among policymakers, implementers, and participants. By ensuring consistent communication, policy goals and objectives can be effectively translated into actionable steps, thereby minimizing potential distortions during implementation. Conversely, inadequate communication can result in information gaps, reduced preparedness, and, ultimately, a failure to achieve policy objectives (Irawan et al., 2024; Sayuti, 2017).

The Head of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang underscored the significance of robust communication in facilitating the successful execution of the UKN. He highlighted that social media platforms like WhatsApp and organizational websites, particularly those managed by regional coordinators (KORWIL), have played a crucial role in enhancing inter-organizational communication *"communication is currently quite good through social media (WA) and organizational websites, especially regional coordinators,"* he noted. These advancements in communication technology have had a positive impact, expediting the flow of information and enabling more efficient coordination among policy implementers.

Despite the progress in inter-organizational communication, significant challenges persist, particularly in the dissemination of urgent information. For instance, details regarding the location of the Competency Test Site (TUK) and supporting documents are often communicated to organizers on very short notice, sometimes as late as a day before the test. The Head of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang expressed concern over this issue, stating, *"sometimes the information comes quite suddenly, so the preparation is not optimal."* This highlights the urgent need for improved management of information dissemination to allow for more thorough and planned preparations.

From the participants' perspective, especially for retakers (those who need to repeat the UKN), communication remains a more pronounced challenge. A graduate of STIKES Guna Bangsa who failed the UKN revealed that there is virtually no direct communication between the organizing committee and retakers *"so far, there is no communication between the organizing team and retakers, only the organizing team to the institution (competency test information), but that is also sometimes sudden,"* he remarked. This lack of direct engagement has resulted in insufficient understanding among retakers regarding the UKN process and requirements, potentially reducing their chances of success.

While modern communication tools have streamlined some aspects of UKN implementation, significant issues remain, such as the sudden delivery of critical information and the absence of direct interaction with participants. To enhance the effectiveness of policy implementation, there is a pressing need to

improve communication mechanisms at all stages of planning and execution. Structured, inclusive, and timely communication will not only bolster the readiness of implementers and participants but also enhance the accountability and transparency of the policy itself. By addressing these challenges, the implementation of the UKN can become more efficient, equitable, and aligned with its overarching objectives.

5. Cost

The successful implementation of policies such as the National Competency Test (UKN) is influenced by multiple factors, including both economic and social dynamics. In the case of UKN, the social challenges faced underscore the need for policy alignment with community understanding (Jumita et al., 2021; Zayu et al., 2024). For example, the Chairperson of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang pointed out the prevalent lack of awareness among parents about the importance of UKN. Many parents believe that a college diploma alone guarantees their children's professional competence, stating, *"parents of students often question the benefits of the competency test because they think that if students have graduated and received a diploma, why should they be tested again?"* This statement reveals a significant gap in communication between policymakers and the community, with parents key stakeholders remaining uninformed about the broader purpose of UKN.

This disconnect highlights the critical need for effective public education to clarify that the UKN is not a redundant formality, but a vital process for certifying the professional competence of graduates. It is imperative that efforts are made to bridge this information gap, ensuring that the community fully understands the value of the competency test as a means of guaranteeing the quality of professionals entering the workforce. Without such understanding, the implementation of the UKN will continue to face resistance and underutilization. Economic factors also present a significant hurdle in the implementation of the UKN. The financial burden associated with preparing for the competency test often places undue pressure on families, particularly those from lower-income backgrounds. As the Chairperson of STIKES Karya Husada Semarang explained, *"the competency test will increase the cost of education to finance a series of activities to prepare students for the competency test, and*

this will certainly also burden the parents of students economically."

This concern is valid, as families struggle to balance the cost of education with other financial responsibilities. Furthermore, the experience of a graduate from STIKES Guna Bangsa, who failed to pass the UKN and has yet to receive a Registration Certificate (STR), adds to the complexity. The graduate pointed out the fees for registration as a significant financial challenge, noting, *"actually, many feel objections to the fees charged, for the registration fee alone for NERS 275, Midwives and Vocational Nurses 225, but conditions in the field were found to have withdrawn registration fees that exceeded these provisions."* Such practices not only exacerbate the economic strain but also underscore the need for transparency and accountability in the fee structure.

These economic and social barriers together undermine the effectiveness of the UKN. A lack of public understanding, combined with the high costs involved, can lead to decreased participation and lower success rates. To address these issues, a more holistic approach is required one that includes comprehensive public education, fee transparency, and the provision of financial assistance for economically disadvantaged students. By adopting an inclusive and adaptable policy framework, the UKN can become a more effective tool for enhancing the professional qualifications of health workers while addressing the social and economic challenges faced by many students.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis presented in this study underscores that the success of the National Competency Test (UKN) is contingent upon five pivotal elements: a clear understanding of objectives, adequate resource allocation, the attitudes of those involved in implementation, seamless inter-organizational communication, and effective cost management. First and foremost, ensuring that all stakeholders policymakers, educators, and students share a common and thorough understanding of the UKN's objectives is critical. This clarity ensures that the policy is recognized as an essential tool for maintaining the quality of graduates. Without this shared understanding, efforts to implement the policy risk becoming fragmented and ineffective.

Equally important are the resources required to support UKN's successful execution,

including adequate infrastructure, well-equipped facilities, and competent teaching staff. These resources create an environment where students are equipped for success. Additionally, the attitudes of examiners and institutional leaders play a significant role in shaping a supportive and professional examination atmosphere, which directly influences student performance. The role of inter-organizational communication cannot be overstated either. Effective collaboration between educational institutions, UKN organizers, and regulatory bodies ensures that technical challenges are addressed promptly and that the policy is consistently evaluated and improved. Finally, the management of costs must be approached with inclusivity, ensuring that students from all socioeconomic backgrounds are not excluded from participating in the test. This inclusivity not only increases fairness but also maximizes the policy's impact by fostering a diverse pool of future health professionals.

By addressing these five interconnected factors in a comprehensive and integrated manner, the UKN policy can fulfill its core mission: producing competent, skilled, and competitive healthcare professionals. To further enhance the effectiveness of the UKN policy, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education conduct a thorough evaluation of the entire competency testing system, with particular attention to its financial aspects. Such an evaluation should focus on ensuring that the costs associated with the UKN do not create undue financial burdens, particularly for students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. By adopting a more equitable and inclusive funding approach, the Ministry can reduce the economic barriers to participation, leading to higher rates of student enrollment and success in the UKN. This policy adjustment would not only foster greater accessibility but would also significantly bolster the long-term potential of the UKN to improve the quality and diversity of health professionals across the country.

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