

School Management Policy in Determining Vocational Competency Test Schemes for Vocational Education

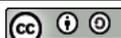
Muhammad Sayuti¹, Barry Nur Setyanto², Muhammad Kunta Biddinika³, Sri Mulyani⁴, Muhammad Khoirul Ma'arif⁵, Suwardi⁶, Joko Harinto⁷, Fuad Wijantoro⁸, Harry Agus Susanto⁹, Noviatun Hasanah¹⁰, Meshack Chuma Opwora¹¹

^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8}Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

⁹Vocational Education (SMK) Muhammadiyah Imogiri, Bantul, Indonesia

¹⁰Vocational Education (SMK) Muhammadiyah Bangunjiwo Kasihan, Bantul, Indonesia

¹¹University of Newcastle, Newcastle, Australia



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ABSTRACT

Objective: Vocational education plays a strategic role in preparing competent workers aligned with industrial needs, yet the implementation of the Skills Competency Test (UKK) still faces issues such as gaps between taught competencies and industry demands, mismatches between education and the labor market, and the lack of UKK standardization. This study aims to analyze vocational school policies in designing UKK schemes to enhance the relevance of vocational education to labor market needs, focusing on the effectiveness of these policies in preparing students to face workplace challenges. **Method:** The research method is carried out through case studies with the stages of formulating research focus, data collection, data processing and analysis, triangulation of findings, and drawing conclusions as a basis for recommendations for improving the vocational education system. Results indicate UKK scheme selection relies on internal and external factors, particularly industry synchronization. The industrial scheme is more technologically adaptive and cost-efficient than LSP. However, trade-offs include limited facilities and the short three-year LSP certificate validity relative to industry demands. Periodic evaluation of materials and tools is essential to address gaps, enhance quality, and prepare graduates for global competition. **Novelty:** Going beyond procedural compliance, this study offers new insights into UKK standardization by analyzing strategic scheme selection. This study integrates policy analysis with implementation results to redefine UKK as a mechanism for operationalizing national standards and enhancing graduates' global competitiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Vocational education is one of the strategic pathways to prepare a skilled workforce that is by industry demands. Therefore, school policies in determining the Vocational Competency Test (UKK) scheme in Bantul Regency are very important. Some problems are still experienced in its implementation, such as the gap between the skills learned in school and the demands of the industry, job-education mismatch (Stoevska, 2018) and lack of standardization in the implementation of UKK (Hardiyanta & Wagiran, 2023). UKK as a technical and non-technical assessment process through the collection of evidence in a suitable qualification unit to determine whether it is competent or not.

It is worth considering that most vocational school graduates cannot get a job that matches their field of competence (Hasibuan & Handayani, 2021), graduates generally work without considering the field of study they are pursuing in school (Ariyani et al., 2021; Pambudi & Harjanto, 2020). The results of the study showed that there was a mismatch between the education provided and the need for employment. In addition, the process of evaluating students' abilities upon graduation has not been fully effective in ensuring graduates are ready to work professionally. Therefore, an analysis of school

policies in compiling the UKK scheme must be carried out to identify what needs to be revised according to the certification scheme of the participant's chosen field, to develop students' skills and ensure the quality of their competencies (Sudradjat & Djanegara, 2020).

Analyze the policies implemented by vocational schools in Bantul Regency related to the preparation of the UKK scheme. The results of the analysis can be found to be significant shortcomings or obstacles in the process of implementing UKK as a tool to measure students' abilities after completing the study program. In addition, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of the UKK scheme in preparing students to face challenges in the real world of work.

The urgency of this research is very great because the economic development of a region is highly dependent on the availability of competent labor. In increasing demand for a professional workforce, it is important for vocational education institutions to provide relevant and effective programs. The results of the research are expected to be a reference for education policymakers and other stakeholders to improve the vocational education system to be more relevant and in accordance with work needs. The results of the research are also expected to offer practical solutions for vocational schools in Bantul Regency to improve the quality of vocational education. Through the identification of factors that affect the alignment between the educational curriculum and industrial needs, it can be a consideration in determining a more appropriate UKK scheme so as to produce graduates who are ready to work. The real contribution of this research is to help improve the quality of human resources in the area, so that it contributes positively to local and national development.

Vocational education aims to prepare students with relevant skills and knowledge to be ready to enter the world of work, through a curriculum that integrates practical learning principles and government policies regarding UKK that emphasizes graduate competency standards in accordance with the needs of the industry and the KKN level. The Law on the National Education System Number 20 of 2003, vocational education is designed to produce competent graduates in certain fields. The philosophy of vocational education encompasses various schools of thought, such as essentialism that emphasizes mastery of basic knowledge, pragmatism that focuses on practical application, and reconstructionism that promotes social change.

The principles of vocational education, as expressed by Charles Prosser, include the importance of creating a learning environment that resembles real conditions in the workplace and the use of tools and machinery that are appropriate for industry. This principle aims to shape students' work habits and improve learning effectiveness through the involvement of experienced teachers. Thus, vocational education not only teaches technical skills but also prepares students to adapt in a dynamic work environment.

Government policies regarding UKK in vocational schools are regulated in Government Regulation Number 4 of 2022 and Permendikbud Number 34 of 2018. The policy emphasizes the importance of graduate competency standards that students must achieve, focusing on practical skills relevant to industry needs (DitSMK, 2023; Hardiyanta & Wagiran, 2023). UKK is carried out by the Professional Certification Institute (LSP: P1-P2-P3) or an accredited vocational school in collaboration with the world of work which aims to assess the achievement of graduate competency standards in accordance with the KKN level and the material refers to a certification scheme that

is in accordance with the level of qualification of graduates, containing the ability to carry out specific, operational, quality assurance work (DitSMK, 2023).

KKNI is a system that harmonizes education, training, and work experience to create quality human resources in a scheme of recognition of work competencies that are in accordance with the structure of various work sectors (Permendikbud, 2022; Perpres, 2012; Taufik et al., 2023). KKNI has nine levels of qualifications, from the lowest to the highest, based on the achievement of competencies set nationally (Perpres, 2012; Santosa et al., 2022). KKNI also supports the implementation of vocational education by connecting theory and practice in the curriculum. KKNI not only serves as a tool to equalize qualifications but also as a guide in designing an educational curriculum that is relevant and responsive to the development of the world of work (Santosa et al., 2022) and to qualify for the KKNI qualification requires careful preparation so that students obtain a certificate of competency (Aini & Sudirman, 2024).

It is interpreted that KKNI is a system that harmonizes education, training, and work experience to create quality human resources through nine levels of qualifications, supports vocational education by connecting theory and practice, and requires careful preparation so that students can obtain competency certificates that are relevant to industry needs. SKKNI is the formulation of work skills that includes knowledge, skills, and work attitudes related to the implementation of tasks in various work sectors. SKKNI is designed to prove that graduates have the ability to meet the demands of industry and the job market. Based on the Regulation of the Minister of Manpower Number 83 of 2012, SKKNI functions as a guide in the preparation of education and training curriculum, so that graduates can meet the needs of the industry. SKKNI in vocational education is intended to provide an objective and accurate evaluation of students' abilities (Sardi et al., 2024). SKKNI regulates two main things: as a professional certification framework (competency certification) and as a Competency-Based Education and Training (PPK) framework (Sayuti, 2017). SKKNI as shown in figure 1.

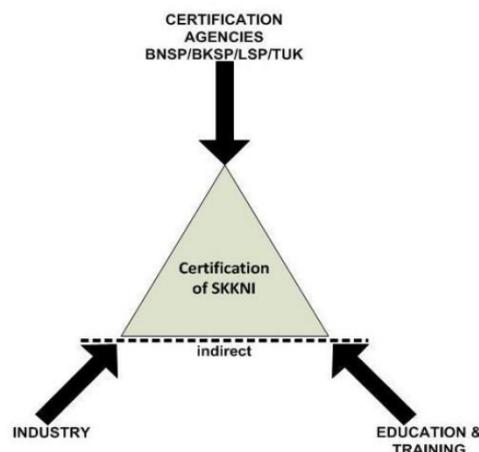


Figure 1. The Three Pillars of SKKNI Certification (Sayuti, 2015)

The competence of vocational school graduates is expected to be recognized nationally (Putri, 2017). The competencies that students have will affect students' work readiness (Susila et al., 2021). Before graduating and being declared competent, students must be able to go through UKK. Implementation UKK should be adjusted to SKKNI (Hidayah, 2020). The implementation of UKK with national education standards aims to produce graduates who can contribute to the industry so as to produce outcome that can

be taken into account (Nurendah, 2024). In order to increase student readiness, the school seeks to provide early and more planned preparation so that students will be better prepared when entering the field (Widyastuti et al., 2020). Vocational schools have made efforts to meet the needs of the industry in order to meet the skilled labor sector with industry standards (Krisnandi et al., 2023).

The Competency Test Program can take place well and effectively supported by a conducive environment, constructive feedback, optimal implementation, and produce a Competency Certificate for qualified participants (Setyowati et al., 2023). Having a certificate of competency will certainly make vocational school graduates more likely to be accepted into the world of work (Gaol et al., 2023; Sumawidari & Putra, 2021). Schools and industry need to work more synergistically in creating a professional workforce so that the industry can accept workers according to demands [22]. Management and industrial relations strategies are needed to establish good cooperation with the world of work and industry in order to improve students' abilities (Lestari et al., 2022).

The implementation of UKK uses standards that have been determined by the industry, LSP, or test equipment issued by the Ministry of Education and Culture to produce Output who are able to compete in the job market and have qualified skill competencies (Yahya et al., 2023). In the study, the researcher described the implementation of UKK in vocational schools as a tool to measure students' abilities using experimental methods. The research is in line with explaining the stages of preparation, implementation, and evaluation of good and maximum UKK activities, so that it will be able to create humans with good competence (Saputro, 2016). Another study linked the influence of Field Work Practice (PKL) to the results of UKK using the observational research method, the results showed that the implementation of street vendors went well in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) can meet the needs of students and have an influence on the results of UKK from the perspective of students' skills and knowledge (Kustini et al., 2021).

Previous studies have extensively discussed UKK execution, focusing primarily on procedural stages and general standards. However, scant attention has been paid to the strategic decision-making process underlying the selection of specific UKK schemes. This gap is critical, as the decision to adopt a particular scheme serves as the primary mechanism for translating national policy frameworks (KKNI and SKKNI) into local school management practices. This research addresses this void by investigating the rationale behind scheme selection, implementation dynamics, obstacles, and the pivotal role of industrial stakeholders. By analyzing these factors, this study uncovers how national standards are operationalized at the school level in Bantul Regency, ultimately offering evidence-based recommendations to enhance UKK effectiveness.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach. The research process encompasses formulating the focus, data collection, processing, thematic analysis, triangulation, and conclusion drawing. Subjects were selected using purposive sampling from the population of vocational schools in Bantul Regency. The sample consists of SMK Negeri 1 Sewon, SMK Negeri 1 Bantul, and SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bantul, selected for their high number of majors, extensive industrial cooperation, and possession of LSP P1 status. Participants included principals or vice principals of curriculum/public relations. The research flow began with focus formulation and preparation of documents.

Subsequently, data collection was conducted at the three qualified schools. It is important to note that while these key informants provided high-level administrative insights, relying on a single strategic perspective per site constitutes a methodological limitation, as it may not fully capture the granular variations across all specializations.

The qualitative data obtained were transcribed and analyzed using Braun & Clarke's six-step thematic analysis: introduction, generating code, searching for themes, evaluating themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. The research flow starts from formulating the research focus, before proceeding to the data collection stage, the researcher and his team prepare documents and equipment for data collection. Data collection was carried out in three schools that had qualifications based on the largest number of majors and cooperation with the most industries with one resource person, one teacher who served as vice principal for curriculum affairs or public relations. The data collection stage was carried out by interview. The researchers acted as the primary instrument, maintaining reflexivity and adhering to ethical standards regarding informed consent and data confidentiality throughout the process. To ensure a solid and sound analysis, the UKK schemes were categorized and evaluated based on critical dimensions: alignment with industrial needs (SKKNI), cost-efficiency, and infrastructure readiness. Findings underwent triangulation via member checking, where results were submitted back to participants to validate accuracy. The final stage involved drawing conclusions strictly aligned with the research objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the results of the interview transcript regarding the school's policy in determining the Competency Test of Expertise (UKK) scheme at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bantul, it can be concluded that the selection process of the UKK scheme is carried out by considering various internal and external factors. The school has five specializations, namely Automotive Vehicle Engineering (TKRO), Machining Engineering (TPM), Motorcycle Business Engineering (TBSM), Audio Video Engineering (Electronics), and Software Engineering (RPL). In the implementation of UKK, schools already have TUK (Competency Test Place) permits from BNSP and LSP P1 (First Party Professional Certification Institutions), which are the main basis for the implementation of the current UKK scheme. Key findings highlight gaps between taught competencies and industry requirements, evidenced by principals' statements: while LSP P1 offers standardized certification, its three-year validity lags behind rapid technological advancements in specializations like TKRO and RPL. In contrast, industrial schemes demonstrate greater adaptability but face infrastructure limitations. These policy differences underscore the need for periodic alignment between curriculum standards and evolving workforce demands.

The decision-making process related to the selection of the UKK scheme involves mapping students' careers, assessor decisions, student abilities, available facilities/infrastructure, and synchronization with industry partners. Currently, the UKK scheme implemented is LSP P1, although in the previous year it used an independent scheme because it was in the process of renewing the LSP license. The main reason for choosing a particular scheme, such as an industrial scheme or LSP P1, is to equip students with a certificate of competence that is widely recognised by the world of work so that

they can compete in the industrial market. Government policies do not significantly affect the decision to select the UKK scheme, because the decision is based more on the consideration of assessors, student conditions, facilities/infrastructure, and alignment with business and industry partners (DUDI).

Similarly, at SMK Negeri 1 Bantul, collaboration with stakeholders, such as partner industries and professional certification bodies, also played a crucial role in selecting the UKK schemes. Partner industries provide recognition for certificates issued, thereby increasing the competitiveness of graduates. Meanwhile, LSP P1 provides an alternative for students who do not pass the industrial scheme UKK. In terms of quality, the UKK scheme is considered quite good when viewed from the suitability of the curriculum, assessment instruments, implementation process, and readiness and absorption of students in the world of work. However, challenges remain, such as the lack of independent assessors, the relatively long duration of UKK implementation due to the large number of students, and administrative technical limitations that still depend on central approval.

Overall, the impact of the selection of the UKK scheme on the quality of graduates is quite positive, because graduates who have BNSP certificates are more considered by companies. The hope in the future is that LSP will continue to maintain quality and provide excellent service, as well as encourage other schools to have a minimum LSP of P1 to create the same standards. Recommendations for improving the quality of UKK implementation include evaluating UKK results as input materials to align learning materials with industry needs, so that students are better prepared to face the world of work.

Based on the results of the interview transcript regarding the school's policy in determining the Competency Test (UKK) scheme at SMK Negeri 1 Sewon, it can be concluded that the selection process for the UKK scheme is carried out by considering various internal and external factors. The school has six specializations, namely Beauty, Fashion, Culinary, Tourism Service Business, Hospitality, and Network Computer Engineering (TKJ), which includes five fields of tourism and one field of technology. In the implementation of UKK, the school already has a Competency Test Place (TUK) permit from the National Professional Certification Agency (BNSP) and the First Party Professional Certification Agency (LSP P1). The implementation of UKK is usually carried out at the end of the school year, with the main considerations being the ability of students, the relevance of the exam material to the curriculum, and the needs of the industrial world.

The decision-making process related to the selection of the UKK scheme involves initial synchronization between schools and industry partners to ensure that the exam materials are in accordance with employment needs. The UKK scheme currently implemented includes two types, namely the LSP scheme and the industrial scheme. The main reason for choosing a particular scheme, such as an industrial scheme, is the flexibility of the exam material that can be adapted to the times and the more cost-efficient compared to the LSP scheme. In addition, certificates from industrial schemes have a lifetime validity, while LSP certificates are only valid for three years. However, government policies do not have a significant influence on the decision to select the UKK scheme, because schools are given the freedom to determine the most suitable scheme.

Cooperation with stakeholders, such as partner industries and professional certification bodies, plays an important role in the selection of UKK schemes. Partner

industries play a role in discussing exam materials and verifying the facilities/infrastructure used, while LSP provides exam quotas for students based on assistance from BNSP. Viewed in terms of quality, the industrial UKK scheme is considered more in accordance with the curriculum because the Critical Point (CP) can be adjusted, the assessment instrument is discussed jointly between schools and industry, and the implementation process involves assessors from various parties. The readiness of students in facing UKK is seen from their competency track record from grades X to XII, and the absorption rate of graduates in the industrial world reaches 98%, showing the relevance of the program to the needs of the job market.

However, the implementation of UKK also faces several challenges, such as limited time and students' ability to complete all the materials taught, as well as facilities/infrastructure constraints, especially in the Hospitality department which requires a special practice room. The impact of the selection of the UKK scheme on the quality of graduates is quite significant, because the certificates received by students only include the competencies tested in the UKK, even though the report card records all competencies that have been achieved. This has the potential to affect the job recruitment process that prioritizes certificate documents over report cards.

The hope in the future is that the scheme that has been carried out will be maintained because it is assessed in accordance with the needs of students and the industry. Synchronization between schools and industry is considered a strategic step to ensure the suitability of educational programs to the needs of the world of work. Recommendations for improving the quality of UKK implementation include periodic evaluation of learning materials and assessment instruments to remain relevant to industry needs.

Based on the results of the analysis using the NVivo software shown in the figure, it can be seen that the factors that influence the basis of the selection of the scheme have been identified and presented in the form of a relationship diagram. Here is the logical and scientific interpretation of the results of the analysis:

A. Scheme Selection Basis

The diagram shows that the schema selection base (the main node) has five main branches that represent the key factors that influence the schema selection process. These factors include:

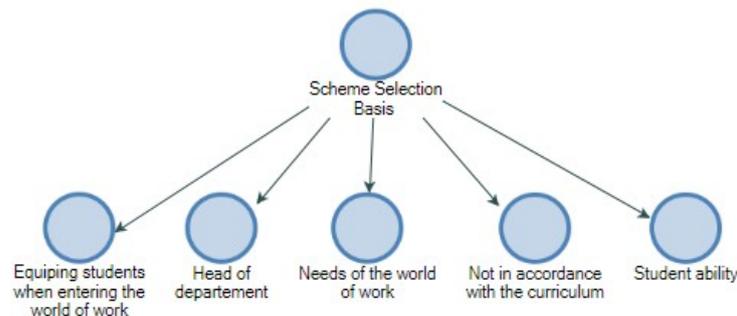


Figure 2. The Scheme Selection Basis

The diagram shows that the schema selection base (the main node) has five main branches that represent the key factors that influence the schema selection process. These factors include:

- a. Equipping Students When Entering the World of Work, one of the main objectives of the selection scheme is to comprehensively prepare students to be ready to work in the world of work after graduation. The scheme chosen must focus on developing practical skills (hard skills) and soft skills that are relevant to the needs of the industry.
- b. Head of Department, The head of department has an important role in the scheme selection process. They are responsible for determining the scheme that best suits the academic program and the needs of their respective majors. Their decisions are based on an in-depth analysis of the curriculum, available resources, and student learning outcomes.
- c. Needs of the World of Work, Industry and the job market have specific needs related to the skills and competencies needed by vocational school graduates. The scheme chosen must be relevant to the demand of the job market so that graduates can compete effectively. This reflects efforts to bridge the gap between education and the world of work.
- d. Not in Accordance with the Curriculum, it is important for schools to ensure that the scheme chosen does not conflict with the established curriculum. The scheme must be aligned with national or local curriculum standards to remain relevant and meaningful in the context of formal learning.
- e. Student Ability, student ability is an important factor in the selection of a scheme. The scheme chosen must be in accordance with the level of ability and potential of students, and be able to improve their competence optimally. It also involves considering students' interests and talents, so that they feel motivated and dedicated to the program.

The results of analysis show that the basis for the selection of the scheme is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. External factors, such as the needs of the world of work and equipping students when entering the workforce, indicate an orientation to practical relevance and career preparation. Meanwhile, internal factors, such as the head of the department, student ability, and incompatibility with the curriculum, highlight the importance of internal coordination, adaptation to student capacity, and integration with the existing education system. Overall, schema selection is a complex process that requires thorough consideration of various interrelated elements.

B. Applied Scheme

The diagram shows that the implemented schema (the main node) has three main branches that represent the type of schema used in the context of this analysis. Such types of schemes include:

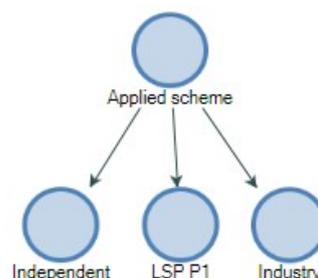


Figure 3. The Applied Scheme

- a. Independent scheme, a scheme that is carried out internally by a school or educational institution without involving external parties such as LSP or industry. In

this scheme, schools have full autonomy in designing, implementing, and assessing the UKK process so that it is more flexible because it is adjusted to local needs and the school's curriculum. However, the grading standards in this scheme may be more limited than in other schemes.

- b. LSP P1 (Professional Certification Institution Scheme Category P1), is a scheme implemented by independent institutions that have received special accreditation to conduct competency tests. This scheme is responsible for the management and assessment of UKK with strict standards in accordance with SKKNI (Indonesian National Work Competency Standards). The results of the competency test from LSP P1 are recognized nationally and internationally, and the process is more formal and structured by involving professional assessors to ensure the fairness and validity of the results.
- c. Industry (Partner Industry Scheme) involves direct cooperation between schools and partner industries in the implementation of UKK. In this scheme, partner industries have an active role in determining assessment instruments, evaluation methods, and competency standards, so that the results of competency tests are often immediately recognized by the industry. The process is more practical and focuses on competencies relevant to the needs of the world of work, and can be a platform for students to get internship or job opportunities directly after graduation.

The results of NVivo's analysis show that the schemes applied include three main types: Industrial, LSP P1, and Independent. Each type of scheme has unique characteristics and objectives, but all aim to ensure the relevance, quality, and competitiveness of the education or training program. The Industrial Scheme focuses on cooperation with the industrial world to increase practical relevance, the LSP P1 scheme emphasizes the importance of officially recognised professional certifications, while the independent scheme provides flexibility for institutions to develop programmes according to internal needs. Overall, the combination of these three schemes reflects an effort to create an education system that is comprehensive, relevant, and ready to meet the challenges of the modern world of work.

C. Scheme Decision Making Process

The diagram shows that the schema decision-making process (the main node) has five main branches that represent the key factors that influence this decision-making process. These factors include:

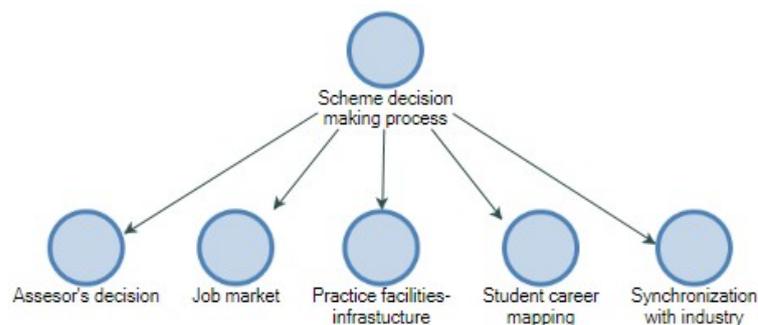


Figure 4. The Scheme Decision Making Process

- a. Assessor's Decision refers to the decision taken by the assessor in determining the scheme that is most in line with the established competency standards. Assessors

- have a central role in evaluating the suitability of schemes based on objective assessments of student abilities, evaluation methods, and competency test results.
- The Job Market is an important factor in the selection of a scheme because the scheme chosen must be relevant to the demand of the industry and the needs of the world of work. The decision-making process must ensure that graduates are ready to compete in the job market.
 - Practice Facilities-Infrastructure includes the availability of physical and technological facilities that support the effective implementation of the scheme. Adequate practice facilities are essential to provide a real learning experience for students.
 - Student Career Mapping helps to understand students' interests, talents, and career goals so that the chosen scheme is in accordance with their potential. This mapping ensures that students feel motivated and receive training that is relevant to the career path they want to pursue.
 - Synchronization with Industry, involves coordination between schools or educational institutions and partner industries. This synchronization ensures that the chosen scheme is in accordance with the competency standards expected by the world of work, increases the relevance of the program, and opens up wider employment opportunities for graduates. All of these elements are interconnected and play an important role in ensuring that the scheme chosen is effective, relevant and beneficial to students as well as the world of work.

The results of NVivo's analysis show that the scheme decision-making process is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. External factors, such as the job market and synchronization with industry, indicate an orientation on practical relevance and career preparation. Meanwhile, internal factors, such as assessor decisions, student career mapping, and practice facilities/infrastructure, highlight the importance of internal coordination, adaptation to student capacity, and adequate infrastructure support. Overall, the scheme decision-making process is a complex mechanism that requires a thorough consideration of various interrelated elements.

D. Reasons for Choosing a Scheme

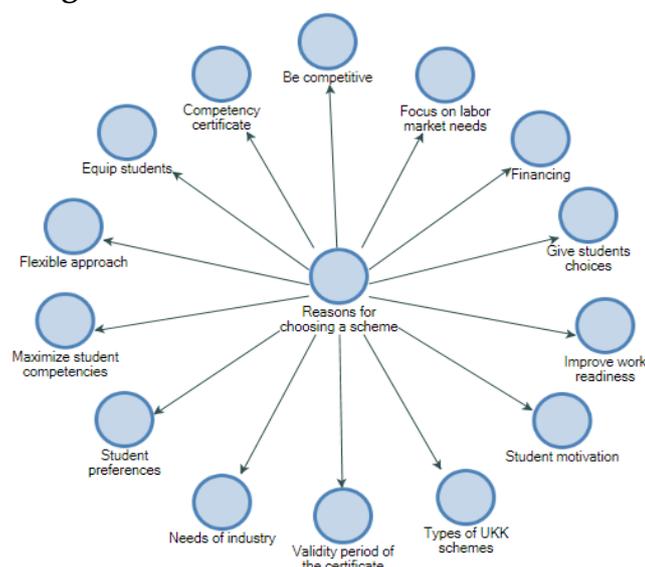


Figure 5. The Reasons for Choosing a Scheme

The diagram shows that the reason for the selection of the scheme (the main node) has six main branches that represent the key factors on which the scheme selection is based. These factors include:

- a. Be Competitive, one of the main goals of choosing a UKK scheme is to equip students with competencies that will allow them to compete in the job market. The scheme chosen must be able to increase the competitiveness of vocational school graduates.
- b. Focus on Labor Market Needs, the UKK scheme chosen must be relevant to the current needs of the industry. This reflects efforts to ensure that graduates have the skills that match the demands of the workforce.
- c. Financing, financial aspects are also important considerations. The UKK scheme chosen must have adequate funding support, either from the government, schools, or other institutions, to run the program effectively.
- d. Give Students Choices, it is important for students to have flexibility in choosing a UKK scheme that suits their interests and talents. This can increase students' motivation and success in the program.
- e. Improve Work Readiness, the main goal of UKK is to prepare students to work after graduation. The chosen scheme should focus on the development of practical and theoretical skills relevant to the world of work.
- f. Student Motivation, student motivation is very important for the successful implementation of UKK. The scheme chosen must be able to increase students' interest and enthusiasm in learning and creating.
- g. Types of UKK Schemes, there are several types of UKK schemes, such as standalone schemes, LSPs (Professional Certification Bodies), or partner industries. Each type of scheme has its advantages and disadvantages, so the selection should be based on the school context and the needs of the students.
- h. Validity Period of the Certificate, the validity period of the competency certificate issued by the UKK scheme must be considered. A certificate that is valid for a long enough period will be more beneficial to the student.
- i. Needs of Industry, industry has an important role in determining relevant UKK schemes. The scheme chosen must be in accordance with the needs of the industry so that graduates are ready to work immediately.
- j. Student Preferences, interests and preferences of students must be considered in the selection of UKK schemes. Students are more likely to be successful if they engage in a program that matches their interests.
- k. Maximize Student Competencies, UKK schemes must be designed to maximize students' potential and abilities. The program must support the development of technical skills as well as soft skills.
- l. Flexible Approach, the UKK scheme chosen must be flexible enough to adapt to changing industry needs, regulations, or school conditions.
- m. Equip Students aims to prepare students comprehensively by equipping them with technical skills (hard skills) according to industry needs and non-technical skills (soft skills) through a flexible approach. Motivation, interest, and relevance to the world of work are also considered to ensure students are ready to compete and succeed in the future.
- n. Competency Certificate, a certificate of competency obtained through the UKK scheme must be recognized by the industry. This is an indicator that students have reached certain competency standards.

The results of NVivo's analysis show that the selection of the UKK scheme is not only based on one factor but is a combination of various interrelated aspects. These reasons reflect efforts to create programs that are relevant to the world of work, with reference to the needs of industry and the job market. In addition, the program is also designed to prepare students comprehensively, including the development of hard skills and soft skills, to increase the competitiveness of graduates through recognized certificates and optimal work readiness. The program also pays attention to the interests of students by offering flexibility and considering their interests and preferences. Finally, the program aims to optimize available resources, ensure adequate funding and a flexible scheme in its implementation.

Discussion

Based on the results of the analysis of school policies in determining the Competency Test of Expertise (UKK) scheme at SMK Muhammadiyah 1 Bantul, SMK Negeri 1 Sewon, and SMK Negeri 1 Bantul, it was found that the selection process of the UKK scheme was influenced by various internal and external factors. One of the main factors is synchronization with the industrial world to ensure the relevance of the exam material to the needs of the job. Emphasizes the importance of collaboration between vocational education institutions and industry to increase the competitiveness of graduates, the synchronization not only involves curriculum alignment but also includes verification of facilities/infrastructure and joint discussions related to assessment instruments (Kelly et al., 2024; Oriza, 2024; Suherman et al., 2022). In addition, other reasons for choosing a certain scheme, such as the flexibility of exam materials in the industrial scheme, industrial schemes are more adaptive to technological developments and market trends than LSP schemes which tend to be rigid because they follow national standards (Bruri Triyono & Hariyanto, 2024; Kamaludin, 2024).

In addition to synchronization with industry, the financing factor is also an important consideration in choosing an UKK scheme. Financing Determines the Effectiveness of the UKK Scheme: Beyond industry alignment, financing explains why the LSP P1 scheme fails to bridge the workforce gap, being too expensive for schools with limited budgets. Industry schemes are more affordable but less standardized, creating a trade-off that perpetuates the competency mismatch between training and employers' SKKNI Level 4 requirements. The operational cost efficiency is one of the reasons why some schools prefer industrial schemes over LSP schemes (Chang, 2021). Industrial schemes are considered more cost-effective because they do not require additional certification from external institutions, while the resulting certificates have a lifetime validity. On the other hand, LSP certificates that are only valid for three years are often considered less efficient for students and institutions.

The quality of the UKK scheme is also assessed from its suitability with the curriculum and its impact on students' readiness in the world of work. The results of the interviews show that the industrial scheme is considered more in line with the curriculum because the Critical Point (CP) can be adjusted to practical needs, the industry involvement in the design of assessment instruments helps ensure that the competencies tested are relevant to the real needs of the world of work (Schultz et al., 2022). Standardization Challenges and Solutions: Limited time and inadequate facilities persist despite policy objectives, as the National Skills Standards Standard (SKKNI) assumes uniform resources. Proposed hybrid UKK scheme: Combining LSP certification with

industry-led assessment through a regional resource consortium, modeled after Singapore's ITE or Germany's dual education system, to address local disparities and align with international vocational certification trends.

The impact of choosing the UKK scheme on the quality of graduates is quite significant, especially because the certificates received by students are one of the determining factors in the job recruitment process. The competency certificates that are widely recognized by the industry provide a competitive advantage for graduates in the face of competition in the job market (Suparyati & Habsya, 2024). Therefore, the hope in the future is that the UKK scheme will continue to be improved through periodic evaluation of learning materials and assessment instruments, so that students are better prepared to face the challenges of the modern world of work.

The diagram in Figure 6 illustrates the Policy for Determining Vocational Competency Test Schemes, which provides a comprehensive overview of the factors and processes involved in selecting the right vocational competency test scheme for students. The policy is structured around three main components: Reasons for Choosing Scheme, Basis for Choosing Scheme, and Scheme Implemented. Each component plays a critical role in ensuring that the selected scheme is aligned with educational and industry standards, while meeting the diverse needs of students and stakeholders. The policy framework ensures a systematic and holistic approach to determining vocational competency test schemes, balancing educational objectives, industry requirements, and student needs. Taking into account the diverse factors and perspectives of stakeholders, the policy aims to create a robust and effective system that enhances students' readiness for the workforce.

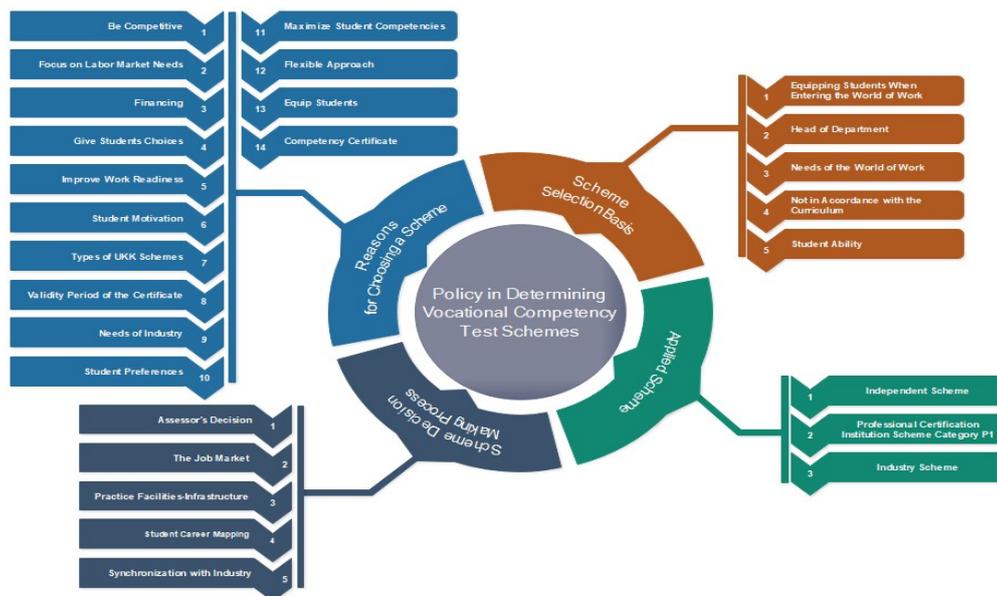


Figure 6. Policy in Determining Vocational Competency Test Schemes

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The study finds that the selection of the Competency Test of Expertise (UKK) scheme in vocational schools is shaped by both internal and external factors. External factors especially industrial needs and links with the labor market are dominant in maintaining relevance and competitiveness. Internal considerations such as student readiness, school facilities, financial capacity, and curriculum alignment also

critically influence the decision-making process. The three UKK schemes (Industry-based, LSP P1, and Independent) reflect diverse strategies for ensuring program quality and graduate competence. **Implication** : These findings imply that policy decisions regarding UKK implementation should balance external demands and internal capacities. Strengthening partnerships between schools and industry is essential for maintaining curriculum relevance and boosting employability. Furthermore, continuous evaluation of exam materials and assessment standards can enhance graduate quality and uphold certification credibility. Policymakers and school leaders should view the UKK scheme not only as an administrative requirement but as a strategic tool to bridge vocational education with real labor market expectations. **Limitation** : The research focuses on two schools within a single regional context, which may limit the generalizability of its conclusions. Variations in institutional capacity, industrial linkage intensity, and resource availability across other regions or SMK types are not fully captured. Additionally, the data primarily emphasize policy and administrative perspectives, with limited exploration of student and employer experiences regarding the effectiveness of each UKK scheme. **Future Research** : Future studies should expand the sample to include diverse vocational schools across regions and industrial sectors to gain a more comprehensive understanding of policy variations. Mixed-method approaches involving students, teachers, industry partners, and alumni could provide deeper insights into how different UKK schemes influence graduate outcomes and employability. Comparative longitudinal research might also explore the long-term impact of certification type on career progression and industry satisfaction.

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***Muhammad Sayuti (Corresponding Author)**

Department of Training and Education Faculty of Teaching and Education,
Ahmad Dahlan University Yogyakarta,
Jl. Ringroad Selatan, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 55191, Indonesia
Email: muhammad.sayuti@mpgv.uad.ac.id

Barry Nur Setyanto

Department of Education Electrical Engineering Faculty of Teaching and Education,
Ahmad Dahlan University Yogyakarta,
Jl. Ringroad Selatan, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 55191, Indonesia
Email: barry.setyanto@pvte.uad.ac.id

Muhammad Kunta Biddinika, Sri Mulyani, Muhammad Khoirul Ma'arif, Suwardi, Joko Harinto, Fuad Wijantoro

Department of Training and Education Faculty of Teaching and Education,
Ahmad Dahlan University Yogyakarta,
Jl. Ringroad Selatan, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, 55191, Indonesia
Email: muhammad.kunta@mti.uad.ac.id

Harry Agus Susanto

Vocational Education (SMK) Muhammadiyah Imogiri,
Jalan Bakulan - Imogiri, Bantul, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55782, Indonesia
Email: harry.smkmuhim@gmail.com

Noviatun Hasanah

Vocational Education (SMK) Muhammadiyah Bangunjiwo Kasihan,
Jl. Monumen Apsari, Bangunjiwo, Kasihan, Bantul, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta 55184, Indonesia
Email: noviatunhasanah2712@gmail.com

Meshack Chuma Opwora

University of Newcastle
Callaghan, NSW 2308, Australia, tepatnya di 150 University Drive
Email: meshack.chuma.opwora@newcastle.edu.au
