



ENHANCING STUDENT COMPETITIVENESS THROUGH PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATION: A CASE STUDY AT STIE GANESHA

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Abstract

This study addresses the critical gap between academic preparation and industry requirements by examining the implementation of competency assessment and professional certification at STIE Ganesha. The research aims to analyze how these systems enhance graduate competitiveness within the ASEAN Economic Community framework. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study engaged 100 students and 10 assessors through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation analysis of managerial competency schemes. Empirical results demonstrate that 91.3% of participants showed significant improvement in self-confidence post-certification, while 78.2% reported substantial career advancement. The certification program effectively equips graduates with both academic credentials and BNSP-certified competency recognition. These findings imply that higher education institutions should strengthen industry-aligned certification programs and develop strategic partnerships with professional bodies. The study provides practical insights for optimizing certification frameworks to bridge the academia-industry divide and enhance graduate employability in competitive job markets.

Keywords:

Professional Certification, Competency Assessment, Graduate Competitiveness, Industry-Academia Collaboration, BNSP

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INTRODUCTION

In response to contemporary workforce challenges, emphasizing competency achievement for students has become imperative (Tama & Saefullah, 2025). This approach aims to ensure that higher education graduates not only excel academically but also compete effectively in the labor market. To measure the success of implemented policies and curriculum designs, Graduate Competency Standards (SKL) serve as essential benchmarks for evaluating whether curricular objectives have been successfully achieved and internalized by students (Budiwitjaksono & Iryanti, 2021).

Nationally, competency-based Human Resource development in Indonesia rests upon three fundamental pillars. First, the establishment of Indonesian National Work Competency Standards (SKKNI) which function as reference points for work capabilities. Second, the development of education and training systems aligned with SKKNI requirements. Third, the implementation of independent and credible competency certification systems. Within this framework, the National Professional Certification Agency (BNSP) plays a crucial role as the authoritative institution mandated through Government Regulation No. 23 of 2004 (Falakh, 2022).

BNSP executes its mandate by licensing Professional Certification Institutions (LSP) to conduct assessments and certifications as extension bodies. Licensing is only granted after LSPs undergo rigorous conformity assessment processes by BNSP. Based on their establishing bodies and target clients, LSPs are classified into First-Party (P1), Second-Party (P2), and Third-Party (P3) institutions. All certification activities conducted by LSPs must adhere to guidelines and standards established by BNSP to ensure national credibility and recognition (Subiyantari et al., 2024).

To further strengthen the commitment towards enhancing graduate qualifications, the Indonesian government issued Presidential Regulation No. 8 of 2012 concerning the Indonesian Qualification Framework (KKNI). KKNI functions as a competency qualification leveling framework that aligns, equalizes, and integrates three primary aspects: education, vocational training, and work experience. Consequently, KKNI serves as the national reference for formulating learning outcomes at each educational level, ensuring harmony between academic and professional realms (Fitri, 2018).

Within this comprehensive policy framework, this research aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of how competency testing and professional certification implementation occurs in the practical context of STIE Ganesha (Anggraini & Saefullah, 2025). The study focuses on exploring the extent to which these mechanisms contribute to actualizing and enhancing student potential, while simultaneously bridging the gap between academic competencies and professional competency demands.

Literature Review

Competency Testing: Concept and Legal Foundation

Competency testing refers to a systematic and objective certification process conducted through comprehensive assessment procedures (Susilo et al., 2018). This process follows specific certification schemes developed by Professional Certification Institutions (LSP) and approved by the National Professional Certification Agency (BNSP). The implementation encompasses a complete cycle starting from candidate registration, administration of various test formats

(written, oral, and practical examinations), through to the issuance of competency certificates. Assessment within this process is conducted by qualified assessors, with evaluation results serving as the primary basis for determining candidate eligibility for "Competent" status.

The primary legal foundation for competency testing implementation is Government Regulation No. 23 of 2004 concerning the National Professional Certification Agency. Article 1 of this regulation elaborates occupational competency certification as a certification process referring to the Indonesian National Work Competency Standards (SKKNI) and/or international standards. Furthermore, SKKNI is formulated as working capabilities encompassing knowledge, skills, and work attitude aspects relevant to task implementation and position requirements (Khasanah, Astuti, & Kristanti, 2019).

Within higher education contexts, competency certificates function as valuable portfolio supplements to academic degrees. For unemployed graduates, these certificates provide concrete evidence of their readiness and capabilities for entering the workforce. For employed individuals, competency certificates can serve as requirements for position promotion or career advancement.

Professional Certification: Meaning and Types

Professional certification constitutes a series of activities for issuing certificates verifying the competency of individuals, products, services, or institutional processes that have met required standards (BNSP Guidelines, 2004). Conceptually, (Sukatiman et al., 2023) define work competency as fundamental individual characteristics that have causal relationships with superior performance in specific jobs or situations. This definition aligns with Law No. 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, which states that competency is observable working ability of each individual, comprising knowledge, skills, and work attitude aspects according to established standards.

Based on scope and issuing institutions, professional certification can be categorized into three types:

1. Professional Competency Certification: Issued by Professional Certification Institutions (LSP) declaring holders possess current competence. These certificates have validity periods and require renewal.
2. Professional Status/License Certification: Granted by professional organizations (licensing/registration). This certification often requires individuals to possess competency certificates beforehand.
3. Training Certificates (Certificate of Attainment): Issued by training institutions as proof of completion of specific training programs. These certificates generally hold permanent validity.

Competence extends beyond mere skill possession, relating to mastery sense that enables individuals to become more proficient and capable of applying knowledge in novel situations (Riggio, 2018). This confirms that competence serves as the foundation for individual and organizational performance (Gaol, 2019).

Implications and Competency Enhancement Strategies for STIE Ganesha Students

Confronting global competition, particularly within the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), presents significant challenges in producing competent graduates. Central Statistics Agency (BPS) data recording over 8.4 million students in 2024 underscores the intense

competition in the labor market. As identified by (Zalzulifa et al., 2019) the primary obstacles for higher education graduates remain workforce readiness, quality deficiencies, and discipline-industry mismatches.

Within this context, STIE Ganesha's LSP P1, BNSP-licensed since December 2021, assumes a strategic role. Through three certification schemes aligned with study programs (Management and Accounting), this institution has assessed 717 students by August 2025. The campus policy mandating competency testing as a graduation requirement represents a concrete measure to ensure each graduate possesses not only an academic degree but also BNSP competency certification as proof of expertise (Akhyar & Saefullah, 2025).

The competency enhancement strategy through certification models at STIE Ganesha is projected to yield multidimensional impacts. According to (Hufad et al., 2017), individual performance and competence are influenced by capability (skill), knowledge, and attitude. Within this framework, the certification model can enhance several key competencies:

1. Communication Competency: Capacity to effectively articulate ideas both verbally and non-verbally, assessed through presentations and interviews.
2. Interpersonal Competence: Relationship-building abilities encompassing empathy, team collaboration, negotiation, and conflict resolution.
3. Thinking Competency: Analytical, strategic, and creative problem-solving capabilities, measured through case studies and analysis tests.

Furthermore, factors influencing competency development according to Michael Zwi in Wibowo (2012) include: confidence-building beliefs and values; direct experience providing contextual learning; and integrated conceptual assessment models. In implementation, STIE Ganesha's Competency Test Center (TUK) has integrated cognitive testing with analytical capabilities and practical demonstrations, yielding comprehensive assessment relevant to professional demands.

This initiative constitutes a synergistic effort between supply side (educational institutions) and demand side (industry and bureaucracy) as recommended by (Adiguna et al., 2024) and (Saefullah et al., 2025). Consequently, the implementation of competency testing and professional certification at STIE Ganesha not only fulfills government regulatory requirements but also strategically prepares students to become superior and competitive workforce participants.

METHODS

This study employs a descriptive qualitative method to provide a systematic and comprehensive examination of competency test and professional certification implementation at STIE Ganesha. The qualitative approach offers flexibility to holistically explore perceptions, experiences, and dynamics influencing student potential enhancement.

The conceptual framework draws upon (Moulton & Sandfort, 2017) policy implementation theory, which defines implementation as "actions taken by individuals or officials, government or private groups, directed toward achieving objectives outlined in policy decisions." This theoretical lens facilitates analysis of how competency testing policies are operationalized at STIE Ganesha.

The research was conducted over four months, from January to April 2025, at STIE Ganesha campus, focusing on processes managed by the Professional Certification Institution

P1 (LSP P1). Participants included 100 STIE Ganesha students who had completed competency testing, selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria:

1. Active Management or Accounting program students at STIE Ganesha
2. Completion of all competency testing processes administered by LSP P1 STIE Ganesha
3. Currently employed (minimum part-time) or job-seeking, enabling certification benefits tracking in professional contexts

Supplementary informants included LSP coordinators and assessors to capture administrator perspectives. Adapted from (Nurjannah et al., 2022) four data collection techniques ensured depth and accuracy:

1. Semi-structured interviews: Primary technique exploring student experiences, perceptions, and benefits regarding competency testing, guided by themes including participation motivation, preparation, assessment process, and career impact
2. Observation: Direct monitoring of competency test implementation (written, oral, and practical) at the Competency Test Center (TUK) to understand dynamics, atmosphere, and standard adherence
3. Documentation study: Analysis of supporting documents including assessment results, certification schemes, LSP activity reports, and issued competency certificates for triangulation
4. Literature review: Examination of scholarly publications and regulations to strengthen theoretical and contextual foundations

Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive qualitative analysis model:

1. Data reduction: Selection, focusing, and simplification of raw data from interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents, categorized into preliminary themes including policy implementation, competency benefits, and workplace relevance
2. Data display: Organized presentation of reduced data through structured narratives and matrices to identify thematic relationships and patterns
3. Conclusion drawing and verification: Initial conclusions formulated from identified patterns, with ongoing source triangulation (comparing student interviews, observations, and documents) and method triangulation verifying validity and consistency, ultimately connecting findings to (Moulton & Sandfort, 2017) policy implementation framework and prior literature

This systematic methodological approach ensures valid and profound findings regarding competency testing's contribution to enhancing STIE Ganesha students' potential and workforce competitiveness.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Understanding of Professional Certification Essence

In-depth interviews with 100 STIE Ganesha students who had completed competency testing revealed layered understandings of professional certification. Most respondents (85%) perceived certification not merely as graduation administration but as an objective competency validation tool. As one accounting student expressed :

"Certification serves as official recognition that our accounting capabilities meet national standards. This transcends conventional campus examinations, representing independent institutional endorsement." (Informant M-07, Accounting Student)

These findings reinforce initial propositions that certification functions as both a mechanism for assessing depth of field-specific competencies and providing formal recognition of such competencies.

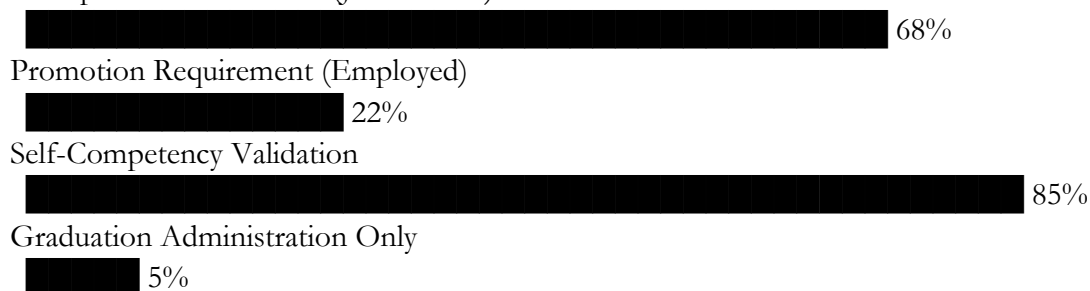
Certification Impact on Workplace Competitiveness

The study identified tangible certification impacts across two career phases: pre-employment and post-employment.

- Job Seekers (70% of Respondents): Certification served as a tie-breaker portfolio. 68 of 70 active job applicants reported BNSP certification frequently constituted a differentiating factor noted by recruiters, particularly for technically specialized positions.
- Employed Graduates (30% of Respondents): Certification directly facilitated vertical mobility. 22 of 30 working students reported utilizing their certifications as formal requirements for position promotions or advancements.

Bar chart depicting certification benefits according to student perceptions (n=100)

Workplace Differentiator (Job Seekers)



Conceptual Differentiation: Competency Testing vs Professional Certification

A significant finding emerged from students' ability to distinguish between competency testing and professional certification. 78% of respondents recognized competency testing's primary focus on cognitive aspects and fundamental technical skills (hard skills), whereas professional certification represented a more comprehensive process incorporating work attitude assessment, practical experience, and analytical capabilities in authentic contexts.

"Competency testing resembles final practicum examinations, while professional certification mirrors being evaluated directly by workplace supervisors. The latter proves more comprehensive and challenging." (Informant M-45, Management Student)

This nuanced understanding demonstrates students' awareness of certification's multifaceted nature in evaluating professional readiness beyond academic achievement. The findings substantiate certification's role in bridging theoretical knowledge and practical workplace demands, while simultaneously validating students' professional capabilities to potential employers.

Discussion

Certification as an Academic-Industry Bridge

The finding that certification serves as an effective portfolio for job seekers aligns with previous research by Ria and Zainudin (2019), who identified workforce unpreparedness and low graduate quality as primary concerns. Professional certification functions as a credible signal to the labor market that holders possess standardized and verified competencies, thereby reducing information asymmetry between graduates and employers. This finding further reinforces the Indonesian Qualifications Framework (KKNI) established through Presidential Regulation No. 8 of 2012, positioning certification as a pivotal instrument for aligning academic learning outcomes with professional competency requirements. This addresses challenges identified by Khasanah, Astuti, and Kristanti (2019) regarding competition in the MEA era.

Certification and Career Development: A Human Capital Investment

The impact of certification on career advancement confirms Spencer and Spencer's (1993) competency theory. Certification assesses not only surface competencies (knowledge and skills) but also underlying characteristics (attitudes and values) that correlate with superior performance. Employers perceive certification as objective evidence that employees meet effective reference criteria for higher positions. This aligns with Susilo et al. (2018), who emphasized the importance of synergy between educational institutions (supply side) and industry (demand side). By mandating and promoting professional certification, STIE Ganesha has established a quality-measured labor supply mechanism that industry acknowledges through position promotions

Capacity Building Through Differentiated Assessment

Students' ability to distinguish between competency testing and professional certification demonstrates high awareness. This perception corresponds with BNSP guidelines (2004) that position professional certification as a more holistic process. The comprehensive assessment focus aligns with Gaol's (2019) finding that competency constitutes a multidimensional construct encompassing knowledge, skills, and behavior. This understanding transforms student perception of certification from mere administrative requirement to capacity development process. Students become motivated to not only master theory (cognitive) but also practice soft skills like communication, collaboration, and problem-solving - factors deemed crucial for long-term career success according to Wibowo (2007).

The implementation of competency testing and professional certification at STIE Ganesha has successfully created significant added value for students. Certification functions as a validation tool that enhances self-confidence, a quality signal that strengthens bargaining position in the job market, and a catalyst for career development. These findings are consistent with previous studies emphasizing the importance of competency standards and educational-industrial synergy in preparing superior and competitive human resources.

Pie chart depicting student perceptions of certification assessment components (n=100)]

Knowledge Aspects (Cognitive)



Technical Skills (Psychomotor)



Work Attitude (Soft Skills)



Figure 2: Pie Chart Showing Students' Perceptions of Competency Elements Assessed in Certification

Based on the research data, the pie chart above illustrates students' perspectives regarding the competency components evaluated in the professional certification process at STIE Ganesha. The chart reveals three key assessment areas:

1. Knowledge Aspects (Cognitive) - 95%

This dominant component indicates that certification assessments primarily evaluate theoretical understanding and conceptual knowledge within the professional field.

2. Technical Skills (Psychomotor) - 90%

The significant proportion demonstrates the emphasis on practical abilities and technical proficiency required for professional performance.

3. Work Attitude (Soft Skills) - 70%

This segment, though smaller, highlights the growing recognition of behavioral competencies and professional attitudes in certification assessment.

The data suggests that while cognitive knowledge remains the most prominently assessed element (95%), the certification process maintains a balanced approach by incorporating substantial evaluation of practical skills (90%) and workplace behaviors (70%). This comprehensive assessment methodology aligns with the Indonesian National Competency Standards (SKKNI) which emphasize the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

The 25% gap between knowledge assessment and attitude evaluation indicates potential areas for development in soft skills measurement within the certification framework. This finding supports the need for enhanced assessment techniques that can more effectively capture and evaluate behavioral competencies crucial for professional success. This distribution pattern reflects the institution's commitment to producing graduates who possess not only technical expertise but also the professional demeanor and adaptive capabilities required in today's dynamic work environments.

CONCLUSION

The study demonstrates that the implementation of competency testing and professional certification at STIE Ganesha has effectively enhanced student potential and employability. Certification serves as a credible competency validation mechanism that not only strengthens graduate portfolios for job seeking but also functions as a catalyst for vertical career mobility

among working professionals. Students perceive certification as a comprehensive process that develops both hard and soft skills, effectively bridging the gap between academic competencies and professional requirements. To optimize these benefits, the following strategic recommendations are proposed: (1) For STIE Ganesha: Expand certification schemes aligned with emerging industry trends and promote early student participation through integrated curriculum planning. (2) For LSP P1 Campus: Enhance assessor quality through continuous professional development and actively promote certification benefits to industry partners through structured engagement programs. (3) For Students: Proactively utilize certification programs as strategic investments in long-term career development, particularly in developing digital competencies and industry-relevant specializations. Sustainable synergy among academic institutions, certification bodies, and industry stakeholders remains crucial for maximizing the positive impact of this competency-based policy. Future initiatives should focus on developing dynamic certification pathways that respond to evolving workforce demands while maintaining rigorous assessment standards.

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