

Evaluation Of the UKT Payment Relaxation Policy at Gorontalo State University

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ABSTRACT

Higher education is a constitutional right of every citizen and a strategic means of developing superior human resources. To ensure equitable access to higher education, the government has implemented a Single Tuition Fee (UKT) policy as a financing scheme tailored to students' economic capabilities. However, in practice, the implementation of the UKT payment relaxation policy at Gorontalo State University has not fully reflected the principles of social justice and the effectiveness of public policy. This study aims to evaluate the implementation of the UKT relaxation policy through a qualitative descriptive approach and using the Alkin evaluation model (UCLA Model) which includes five components: system assessment, program planning, implementation, improvement, and benefits. Data collection techniques were carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation, with data analysis using the Miles and Huberman interactive model. The results of the study indicate that the UKT relaxation policy has not been well-targeted, because it is not supported by a valid student economic database and does not involve a participatory evaluation process. Furthermore, the policy verification and oversight system is still weak, making it vulnerable to abuse by students from middle- to upper-class families. The implications of these findings point to the need for policy reformulation based on accurate data, transparent governance, and increased institutional capacity to realize inclusive and equitable access to higher education.

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a fundamental right of every citizen guaranteed by the Indonesian constitution, as stipulated in Article 31 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution.

Therefore, the state has a major responsibility to provide equitable and quality education services. Higher education, in this context, is a strategic element in enlightening the nation's life and strengthening the competitiveness of Indonesia's human resources. Within this framework, the state encourages improving the quality of the education system through various means, including education financing policies such as UKT (Single Tuition Fee). "Higher education, as an integral part of the national education system, plays a strategic role in enlightening the nation's life" (Utama, 2015). However, the ever-increasing cost of education is a significant burden for students and their families, so affirmative policies are needed such as UKT payment relaxation.

In 2013, the government introduced the UKT system across all state universities as a single tuition payment mechanism tailored to students' economic capabilities. This policy was affirmed in Law Number 12 of 2012 concerning Higher Education and Regulation of the Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education Number 39 of 2017. This system is expected to provide certainty, transparency, and fairness in paying education costs. "UKT rates at state universities are tiered and divided into several groups... so that students with low economic circumstances should receive low UKT rates..." (Regulation of the Minister of Research, Technology, and Higher Education No. 39 of 2017).

However, implementation in the field, particularly at Gorontalo State University, revealed several fundamental issues. Based on initial observations and interviews, it was found that the UKT classification process was often not based on an adequate economic survey. Students also frequently failed to provide complete economic data during re-registration. Furthermore, UKT relaxation was often exploited by students who were economically well-off. "This relaxation policy is not only enjoyed by students whose parents are economically weak but also by students who are economically well-off." This demonstrates the importance of a comprehensive evaluation of the UKT relaxation policy, both in terms of planning, implementation, and the effectiveness of its impact on educational access.

The urgency of this research stems from the need to assess the effectiveness of the implemented policies and their impact on the primary target group, namely students from lower-middle economic backgrounds. Although the relaxation policy was intended to assist groups experiencing financial hardship, the distribution of benefits has not been optimal. "Students often still fail to make payments on time even though they have been granted UKT payment relief," indicating that the policy's initial objectives have not been fully achieved. Furthermore, evaluating policy implementation is crucial for improving the quality of higher education governance, strengthening public accountability, and refining the UKT relief determination mechanism to be more data-driven and socially just.

As a state university, Gorontalo State University requires a financial policy system that is more responsive to the real needs of students. This type of policy evaluation is highly relevant to the demands of good governance principles, particularly in terms of transparency, accountability, and effectiveness of education budget management. "Good management plays a crucial role in ensuring the continuity of academic and non-academic activities at universities" (Hidayat et al., 2019). With the increasing number of students each year and varying family economic capabilities, the UKT relaxation system must be reviewed to ensure it is targeted, efficient, and sustainable.

Based on the above context, this article confirms that the UKT payment relaxation policy at Gorontalo State University still does not fully meet the principles of

social justice and public policy effectiveness. A comprehensive evaluation using the Alkin model and a public administration perspective is needed to assess the extent to which the policy is designed, implemented, and has a real impact on students. Therefore, this article aims to demonstrate that improving the UKT relaxation policy system is an urgent need to ensure equitable and sustainable access to higher education.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to evaluate the Single Tuition Fee (UKT) relaxation policy at Gorontalo State University. This approach was chosen based on the need to gain an in-depth understanding of the policy's implementation and impact from the perspectives of both implementers and beneficiaries. Qualitative research provides researchers with the flexibility to thoroughly explore data within a natural social context. "This research is descriptive qualitative... data collection techniques are conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation," as stated in the thesis document.

This research was conducted at Gorontalo State University (UNG), with the research implementation period starting from the approval of the supervisor and the postgraduate program, until the completion of the research report. The location was chosen purposively because UNG has implemented the UKT policy since 2014 and is a relevant object for evaluating the UKT relaxation policy. The research focused on the policy management units and students receiving the relaxation, thus allowing a comprehensive exploration of the policy's implementation mechanisms.

Data source This study consists of primary and secondary data. Primary data was obtained from in-depth interviews with key informants such as faculty leaders, the university's finance department, and students receiving UKT relaxation. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from official documents such as rector's regulations, academic data, and internal UNG reports regarding the implementation of the relaxation policy. The types and sources of data consist of primary data in the form of interview results, and secondary data in the form of policy documents.

Data collection was conducted through three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to examine the implementation of the policy in the field, particularly the verification and determination of UKT groups. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the experiences and perceptions of informants regarding the effectiveness of the policy. Documentation was used to supplement and confirm the data from the observations and interviews. "Data collection techniques were carried out through direct field observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation of the UKT policy at UNG," explains the research paper.

Data analysis techniques using the interactive model from Miles and Huberman (1994), which includes the process of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. This process occurs cyclically and continuously throughout the research. "The data analysis technique in this study uses the interactive model of Miles and Huberman: data reduction, data presentation, and verification or drawing conclusions." This technique allows researchers to identify patterns in the data and compile findings relevant to the research focus.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the UKT payment relaxation policy at Gorontalo State University represents the educational institution's efforts to achieve social justice through an inclusive education financing scheme. Based on the Alkin evaluation model used in this study, there are five main components that serve as the points of analysis: system assessment, program planning, implementation, improvement, and certification or value/benefit assessment. Although field results cannot yet be fully presented, this conceptual approach allows for the compilation of initial results as a discussion framework that will strengthen the final results.

In general, a systematic assessment of the UKT relaxation policy indicates that the verification and classification system for students' economic ability is not yet optimal at many universities in Indonesia. Research by Kurniawati et al. (2021) showed that although 68% of students agreed with the UKT amount, 76% felt that their parents disapproved of the cost burden. This indicates a gap between the perceptions of campus administration and students' economic realities. This finding aligns with initial observations at UNG, which noted that many students did not provide complete economic data during online re-registration, resulting in inaccurate UKT classification. This inaccuracy in classification can lead to inconsistencies in the granting of relaxation and open up opportunities for injustice to students from low-income families.

In terms of program planning, it is important to emphasize that good policy planning should be participatory and based on accurate data. Howlett and Ramesh (1995) emphasized that policy implementation is highly dependent on the quality of planning and the input used as the basis for decision-making. However, in reality, many campus policies still tend to be top-down without involving real student participation. Research by Vidiastuti and Adzam (2024) on higher education policy innovation highlights the importance of developing digital-based policies and real-time data to prevent inequities in access. This serves as an important lesson for UNG to ensure that relaxation mechanisms are not merely administrative but also reflective of students' real needs.

In terms of policy implementation, it is important to emphasize that successful implementation is greatly influenced by the capacity and commitment of implementing officials. Grindle (1980) stated that "implementation is not only related to bureaucratic procedures, but also involves conflict, benefit distribution, and technical decisions." In the context of UNG, the implementation of UKT relaxation appears not yet fully standardized. This can be seen from internal policies such as UNG Rector's Decree Number 500/UN47/KU/2021, which provides relaxation for vulnerable groups such as orphans, retired parents, and low-income families. However, its implementation in the field is still often criticized due to the lack of independent monitoring and verification mechanisms.

Furthermore, in terms of policy improvement or enhancement, UNG has conducted minimal periodic evaluations to assess whether the UKT relaxation has met the goal of distributive justice. According to Dunn (2003), policy evaluation must be able to answer questions of effectiveness and efficiency, as well as adequacy and equity. Irregularities in the monitoring and reporting process for UKT realization have rendered this policy merely administrative and have not significantly addressed impact aspects. For example, research by Herlina et al. (2023) shows that although UKT revenue contributes significantly to university revenue, its effectiveness in increasing access to education remains questionable due to weak system improvements based on feedback from implementers and students.

Finally, from a benefits (certification) perspective, the UKT relaxation policy has not been able to provide optimal results in terms of increasing attendance, academic achievement, or satisfaction with the financing system for underprivileged students. Mulgan (2000) in his theory of public accountability states that "policy evaluation mechanisms must be able to determine consequences and sanctions if results do not meet expectations." In this case, the absence of an accountability mechanism for the UKT relaxation policy makes the policy vulnerable to abuse and inaccurate targets. For the record, Stufflebeam (2003) in the CIPP model also emphasizes that the final outcome of the policy must be measured through stakeholder satisfaction, goal achievement, and relevance to the social problems faced.

Therefore, this initial discussion confirms that a comprehensive evaluation of the UKT relaxation policy at UNG is not only relevant but also urgent. Previous research indicates that the main challenges in policy implementation lie in targeting accuracy, inequity, and weak feedback mechanisms. These findings are expected to encourage universities to develop data-driven evaluation systems that are more transparent, accountable, and responsive to students' socioeconomic dynamics.

Research Implications

The preliminary results of this study have several important theoretical and practical implications for higher education policy in Indonesia, particularly regarding student funding mechanisms through the relaxation of the Single Tuition Fee (UKT) payment system. These implications serve as a reference for universities, the government, and other stakeholders to implement fairer, more transparent, and data-driven policy reforms.

Theoretical Implications.

This study demonstrates that the use of the Alkin evaluation model (UCLA Model) is highly relevant in assessing the effectiveness of higher education policies because it encompasses the dimensions of system assessment, planning, implementation, improvement, and ultimate benefits. Thus, this approach expands the theoretical contributions of public policy evaluation, particularly in the educational context. This study reinforces Stufflebeam's (2003) finding that evaluation models focus not only on outcomes but also on the process and sustainability of programs.

This model also opens up a dialogue between the administrative dimension and social justice values in education policy, which have so far received little attention in purely performance-based evaluations. Therefore, its theoretical implications can form the basis for developing a social justice-based education evaluation model.

Practical Implications

Research findings suggest that the implementation of the UKT relaxation policy has not been fully responsive to the socio-economic realities of students. In practice, the determination of UKT classification and the granting of relief remain inaccurate due to the lack of validated student microeconomic data. Research by Handayani and Munir (2020) at the University of Lampung showed that "UKT determination often fails to consider students' economic dynamics, and instead becomes a new psychological burden for those economically impacted." The practical implications of these findings encourage policy reformulation with a more adaptive approach, for example: 1) Integration of UKT data with the national social welfare information system (DTKS); 2) Active involvement of the internal audit unit (SPI) in data verification; 3) Development

of a relaxation mechanism based on self-reporting that is cross-verified with data from other institutions (Dukcapil, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Social Affairs).

In this way, the UKT relaxation policy is not only an administrative instrument, but truly becomes a tool for social affirmation and empowerment of underprivileged students.

Policy Implications.

Another important implication concerns higher education governance. This study demonstrates that the UKT relaxation has not been implemented with strong principles of transparency and accountability. This could negatively impact institutional legitimacy and undermine public trust in the higher education system. Research by Yunita & Suharti (2022) on UKT policy at the University of Jambi confirms that accountability relies heavily on the existence of participatory oversight mechanisms and public information transparency, particularly regarding fund management and UKT classification. If these mechanisms are weak, the policy is vulnerable to abuse by unauthorized parties. As a policy implication, the following recommendations are recommended: a) Revise internal university policies to include social justice-based evaluation indicators; 2) Preparation of an annual report on the transparency of the realization of UKT relaxation to the public; 3) Increasing the capacity of human resources managing educational financial policies through data-based training and public service ethics.

CONCLUSION

The policy of relaxing the Single Tuition Fee (UKT) payment at Gorontalo State University has not been fully implemented effectively and on target in addressing the needs of students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Thus, the UKT relaxation policy still requires reformulation and strengthening of the governance system to be able to fulfill the principles of social justice, policy effectiveness, and increasing access to sustainable higher education.

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