

Competency-Based Performance Evaluation Strategies in Combat Units of the Main Command within the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI)

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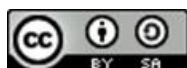
ABSTRACT

This study examines competency-based performance evaluation strategies applied to combat units under the Main Command (Komando Utama) structures within the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI). Traditional military appraisal systems in Indonesia have historically relied on seniority, administrative compliance, and generic rating scales that inadequately capture the operational competencies required of modern combat readiness. Using a qualitative descriptive research design with a case study approach, this study explores how competency frameworks covering technical-tactical proficiency, physical readiness, leadership under operational stress, discipline and character, and teamwork are conceptualized, implemented, and perceived within combat units. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with commanders and staff officers, document analysis of unit evaluation records, and field observation, then triangulated and analyzed thematically. Findings indicate that although formal competency indicators exist, their application remains fragmented, subject to inconsistent interpretation across units, and weakly integrated with career development and readiness planning. The study identifies four strategic levers for strengthening competency-based evaluation: standardized multi-source assessment instruments, digital performance dashboards, competency-linked career pathways, and periodic joint-command calibration forums. This research contributes a context-specific competency evaluation model for TNI combat units, addressing a novelty gap in existing literature that has predominantly examined competency and performance separately or focused on non-combat administrative personnel rather than operational combat readiness.

Keywords: competency-based evaluation; performance appraisal; combat units; Main Command (Kotama); Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI); qualitative case study.

INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian National Armed Forces (Tentara Nasional Indonesia, TNI) constitutes the principal instrument of state defense, organized into three services—the Army (TNI AD), Navy (TNI AL), and Air Force (TNI AU) and further structured into Main Commands (Komando Utama, or Kotama), such as the Army Strategic Reserve Command (Kostrad), regional military commands (Kodam), fleet commands (Koarmada), and special operations commands. Within these Kotama structures, combat units (satuan tempur) represent the operational spearhead of



national defense, tasked with maintaining readiness for conventional warfare, territorial defense, counterterrorism, and rapid-response operations. The effectiveness of these units depends not merely on equipment and doctrine but fundamentally on the competence of the personnel who operate within them—their technical mastery of weapon systems, tactical judgment under pressure, physical endurance, leadership under stress, and adherence to military discipline and values. Consequently, how the TNI evaluates the performance of combat-unit personnel is not a peripheral administrative matter but a strategic determinant of national defense readiness.

Historically, performance evaluation within the TNI—as in many hierarchical military bureaucracies—has been anchored in seniority-based promotion systems, standardized rating forms (Daftar Penilaian Pelaksanaan Pekerjaan or DP3, and its successors), and periodic superior assessments that emphasize administrative compliance, attendance, and generic conduct indicators. While these instruments provide a baseline of accountability, a growing body of scholarship on military human resource management argues that such systems are poorly suited to capturing the multidimensional, context-specific competencies that determine operational effectiveness in combat roles. Rank-based and seniority-driven evaluation, as documented in comparative military HR literature, tends to produce bottleneck effects in career progression and fails to differentiate genuinely high-performing personnel from those who merely accumulate tenure. In combat units specifically, where operational outcomes hinge on rapid decision-making, coordination under fire, and adaptive problem-solving, a evaluation model built primarily on administrative compliance risks masking critical competency gaps until they surface in the field—often at significant cost.

Competency-based human resource management (CBHRM) offers an alternative paradigm, shifting the unit of assessment from position-based duties to the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and other characteristics (KSAOs) that predict superior performance in a given role. Within the Indonesian defense sector, several strands of research have begun to apply this paradigm. Studies on the Indonesian Navy and Marine Corps have shown that technology readiness, strategic leadership, and organizational culture significantly shape organizational performance, suggesting that competency and contextual-organizational factors interact rather than operate independently (Kalambo et al., 2024; Supardi et al., 2024). Research on the TNI Satkomlek has demonstrated that strategic human resource competencies, mediated by knowledge management and information technology, meaningfully influence organizational performance, reinforcing the argument that competency alone is insufficient without institutional mechanisms to translate it into performance outcomes (Lukman et al., 2022). Complementary work on facility and construction units has shown that leadership and soft-skills competencies—not merely technical proficiency—are significant predictors of unit performance (Anggraini et al., 2022), while studies of officer selection systems in the Navy's Electronics Corps have illustrated how qualification-, competency-, and performance-based selection can be integrated into compensation and placement decisions for specialized combat-support roles (Wahid & Faeni, 2025).

At the individual leadership level, case-based analyses of senior TNI figures have illustrated how strategic leadership competencies contribute to national

security outcomes (Rahmawati et al., 2023), while broader comparative studies of human resource competence across the TNI and civilian government institutions have highlighted persistent disparities in how competency frameworks are operationalized across defense and non-defense bureaucracies (Syabilarrasyad et al., 2023). Talent management research has further identified structural bottlenecks—rigid seniority ladders, limited lateral mobility, and underdeveloped succession planning—as key obstacles to translating individual competency into organizational readiness (Gati & Utomo, 2024), a concern echoed in studies of bureaucratic reform implementation within the TNI, which found that formal reform policies often outpace the institutional capacity to operationalize competency-based metrics at the unit level (Rusyianto & Fathurrahman, 2025; Jatmiko & Prasajo, 2022; Subroto & Indriati, 2024).

Beyond the Indonesian context, international military HR scholarship reinforces the same pattern. Competency-based frameworks used by NATO militaries and other advanced armed forces have moved toward narrative, multi-source, and proficiency-tiered evaluation instruments precisely because single-rater, checklist-style forms fail to capture leadership judgment and technical mastery. Broader organizational-behavior research on competency-based approaches likewise emphasizes that competence is not a static trait but a dynamic interaction between individual capability and organizational context, requiring continuous calibration between what is measured and what predicts real performance (Škrinjarić, 2022). Similarly, work on competency-based appraisal design in public-sector and government-linked enterprises demonstrates that successful implementation depends on standardized instruments, manager training, and alignment between appraisal criteria and strategic objectives (Widjaja & Suryani, 2022; Widodo & Nugroho, 2023; Tavares & Vaz, 2025), and empirical evaluations of competency-based assessment systems in operational organizations confirm that effectiveness hinges on consistent cross-unit calibration rather than isolated instrument design (Hanif et al., 2025).

Despite this expanding literature, a critical gap remains. Existing TNI-focused studies have concentrated predominantly on non-combat, administrative, or support functions—human resources at Satkomlek, facility and construction units, selection systems for technical corps, career planning for military academic staff (Silitonga & Rony, 2021), land-asset management (Idris et al., 2025), civil-military cooperation (Effendi, 2023), and bureaucratic or governance reform (Dongoran & Saputra, 2025; Koloay et al., 2024)—or on leadership competency at the level of individual senior commanders (Rahmawati et al., 2023; Yogaswara et al., 2023; Saffrudin et al., 2024). What remains conspicuously underexamined is how competency-based evaluation is designed, implemented, and experienced specifically within combat units under Main Command structures, where the operational stakes of misjudged competency are highest and where the organizational culture, chain-of-command dynamics, and readiness cycles differ substantially from administrative or support settings. Even studies addressing counterterrorism and special-operations human resource development (Adriyanto & Timur, 2025) tend to focus on capability-building programs rather than on the evaluative architecture used to measure and sustain competency over time.

This study addresses that gap by offering the following novelty. First, it develops a context-specific, empirically grounded competency evaluation framework tailored to combat units within TNI Main Commands, integrating technical-tactical proficiency, physical readiness, leadership under operational stress, and character/discipline as interdependent evaluation dimensions—rather than treating competency and performance as separate constructs, as much prior TNI literature has done. Second, it applies a qualitative case-study lens to surface how commanders and personnel within combat units actually interpret, negotiate, and operationalize competency criteria in daily practice, providing insight that quantitative survey-based studies in the existing literature cannot capture. Third, it situates the analysis within the broader institutional reform agenda of the TNI—including bureaucratic reform and talent management initiatives—to propose strategic, implementable levers (standardized multi-source instruments, digital performance dashboards, competency-linked career pathways, and joint-command calibration forums) that connect unit-level evaluation practice to organization-wide human capital strategy. In doing so, this research contributes both theoretically, by extending competency-based HRM theory into the underexplored domain of combat-unit evaluation, and practically, by offering actionable recommendations for strengthening the TNI's performance evaluation architecture in a manner consistent with its ongoing modernization and professionalization efforts.

Although previous studies have discussed the use of artificial intelligence in academic writing, the existing literature remains fragmented across different AI tools, writing outcomes, and educational contexts. Many studies focus primarily on immediate improvements in language accuracy and writing efficiency, while less attention has been given to the conditions under which AI-assisted learning can support higher-order writing abilities and sustainable academic writing development. This gap highlights the need for an integrated review that examines not only the benefits of AI-based writing tools but also the role of AI literacy, instructor guidance, and responsible human-AI collaboration in shaping learning outcomes.

Guided by this rationale, the present study is directed at answering three interrelated research questions. First, how are competency dimensions currently conceptualized and formally documented within the performance evaluation instruments used in combat units under a TNI Main Command? Second, how do commanders, staff officers, and personnel within these units perceive, interpret, and apply competency criteria in day-to-day evaluation practice, and what gaps exist between formal design and lived implementation? Third, what strategic mechanisms could plausibly strengthen the alignment between competency assessment and combat readiness outcomes, given the organizational, cultural, and resource constraints characteristic of Indonesian combat units? By pursuing these questions through a qualitative descriptive case study, this research aims not to produce a generalizable statistical model but to generate a rich, context-sensitive understanding capable of informing both unit-level practice and broader TNI human resource policy—an understanding that, to date, remains largely absent from the literature on Indonesian military performance management.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design using a case study approach, selected because the research aims to produce an in-depth, contextualized understanding of how competency-based performance evaluation is designed, implemented, and experienced within combat units under a Main Command (Kotama) of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), rather than to test statistical relationships between predefined variables. The qualitative descriptive approach is appropriate for capturing the meanings, practices, and institutional nuances that quantitative survey instruments tend to obscure, particularly within a hierarchical and culturally distinct organizational setting such as a military combat unit.

The case study was conducted within one combat unit operating under a TNI Main Command, selected purposively on the basis of operational readiness status, accessibility for research purposes, and its representativeness of standard combat-unit organizational structure. Within this bounded case, embedded units of analysis included battalion- and company-level command elements, staff officers responsible for personnel evaluation, and non-commissioned combat personnel who are the direct subjects of competency assessment.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques, illustrated in Figure 1. First, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with commanders, staff officers, and selected personnel to explore their understanding, application, and perception of competency-based evaluation criteria. Second, document analysis was performed on official unit evaluation records, competency assessment forms, and training and readiness reports to examine the formal architecture of the evaluation system as designed. Third, field observation was carried out during training cycles and evaluation activities to capture how competency assessment unfolds in practice, beyond what is reflected in formal documentation or self-reported interview accounts.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, comprising data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, conducted iteratively rather than in a strictly linear sequence. Initial codes were derived inductively from interview transcripts, observation notes, and document excerpts, then organized into broader thematic categories corresponding to competency dimensions, implementation practices, and strategic recommendations. To establish the credibility and dependability of findings, data source triangulation was applied by systematically cross-checking interview accounts against document analysis and field observation, as elaborated in Section 3.7. Member checking was additionally used with selected key informants to verify that thematic interpretations accurately reflected their intended meaning, and an audit trail of coding decisions was maintained throughout the analytic process to support the study's methodological transparency.

Figure 1. Qualitative Descriptive Case Study Design

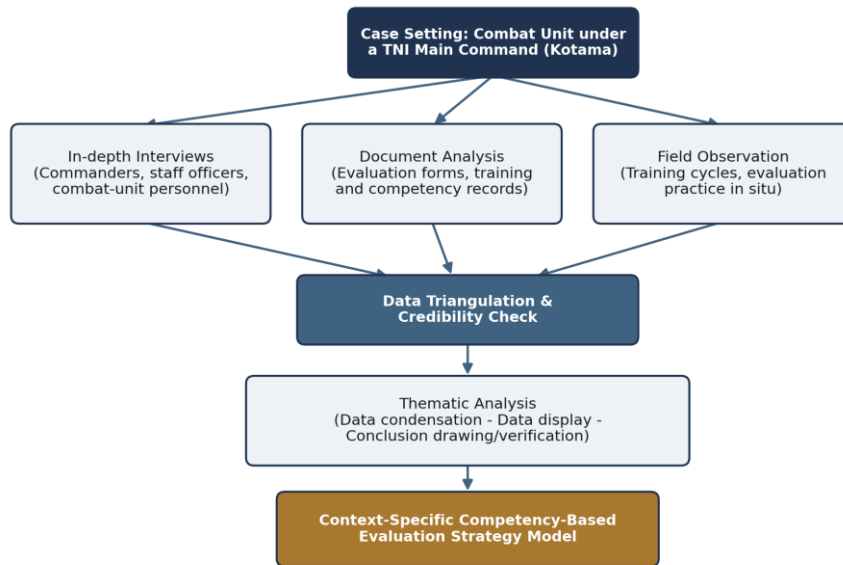


Figure 1. Qualitative Descriptive Case Study Research Design Flow

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Formal Competency Architecture in Combat-Unit Evaluation

Document analysis of unit-level evaluation instruments, cross-referenced with interviews conducted among battalion and company commanders, staff officers, and non-commissioned personnel within combat units under a TNI Main Command, reveals that a formal competency architecture does exist but operates alongside, rather than fully replacing, legacy administrative appraisal instruments. Five recurring competency dimensions emerged consistently across units: (1) technical-tactical proficiency, encompassing weapons handling, small-unit tactics, and mastery of standard operating procedures; (2) physical readiness, measured through periodic fitness and endurance testing; (3) leadership and decision-making under operational stress; (4) discipline, character, and adherence to military values (Sapta Marga and Sumpah Prajurit); and (5) teamwork and coordination within combined-arms or joint-unit settings. These dimensions align closely with competency frameworks identified in prior TNI-focused research, which similarly emphasize leadership, soft skills, and strategic human resource competencies as determinants of unit and organizational performance (Anggraini et al., 2022; Lukman et al., 2022). However, unlike administrative or support-unit contexts, combat-unit informants consistently prioritized real-time tactical judgment and physical endurance as the dimensions most directly tied to survival and mission success, a distinction rarely foregrounded in earlier studies focused on non-combat personnel.

Implementation Gaps Between Design and Practice

Despite the presence of formal competency indicators, this study found substantial inconsistency in how they are operationalized. Interview data indicate that evaluation still relies heavily on single-rater judgment typically the immediate company or battalion commander rather than the multi-source (360-degree) assessment models increasingly adopted in comparative military and public-sector contexts (Tavares & Vaz,

2025; Widjaja & Suryani, 2022). Several commanders acknowledged that competency scoring is frequently completed retrospectively, close to reporting deadlines, based on general impression rather than continuous, evidence-based documentation of specific incidents or training outcomes. This pattern corroborates findings from broader TNI bureaucratic reform research, which identified a persistent gap between the formal adoption of reform-oriented policy instruments and their substantive implementation at the operational level (Rusyianto & Fathurrahman, 2025; Jatmiko & Prasajo, 2022).

A second implementation gap concerns calibration across units. Because each battalion or company commander applies personal judgment in interpreting competency descriptors, personnel transferred between units under the same Main Command reported experiencing markedly different evaluative standards—an inconsistency that undermines both fairness and the aggregate reliability of competency data used for career and promotion decisions. This finding resonates with talent management research showing that inconsistent evaluation standards, compounded by rigid seniority structures, contribute to systemic bottlenecks in officer and non-commissioned officer career progression (Gati & Utomo, 2024). Notably, several respondents suggested that competency evaluation is at times overshadowed by seniority and tenure considerations when promotion decisions are finalized at higher command levels, echoing similar tensions documented in career-development research involving TNI-affiliated academic staff (Silitonga & Rony, 2021).

Perceived Value and Motivational Effects of Competency-Based Evaluation

Despite these implementation challenges, most interviewees expressed a clear preference for competency-based over purely administrative evaluation, citing its greater perceived fairness and its closer connection to operational realities. Personnel who had experienced structured, criteria-referenced assessment typically during specialized training courses or pre-deployment certification reported higher motivation to pursue self-improvement, consistent with organizational-behavior research showing that clearly defined competency standards enhance intrinsic motivation and continuous skill development (Škrinjarić, 2022). This observation aligns with findings from the Indonesian Navy, where technology readiness and strategic leadership were found to interact with organizational performance, suggesting that competency visibility itself functions as a performance-enhancing mechanism, independent of the specific technical content being assessed (Kalambo et al., 2024). Several senior officers additionally noted that competency-based feedback, when delivered constructively, strengthened unit cohesion and trust in the chain of command an effect consistent with research on organizational culture as a mediator of performance improvement in the Indonesian Marine Corps (Supardi et al., 2024).

Table: Competency Dimensions, Current Practice, and Identified Gaps

To synthesize the qualitative findings, Table 1 presents the five core competency dimensions identified in this study alongside the current evaluation practice observed in the case-study combat units and the corresponding implementation gap.

Competency Dimension	Current Evaluation Practice	Identified Implementation Gap
Technical-tactical proficiency	Assessed via periodic live-fire and field exercises, scored by immediate commander	Scoring rarely documented with specific incident evidence; retrospective completion near deadlines
Physical readiness	Standardized periodic fitness and endurance tests (Garjas)	Test results seldom integrated with broader competency dashboard or career records

Leadership under operational stress	Observed informally during training and field exercises	Assessed almost entirely by single rater; rarely triangulated with peer or subordinate input
Discipline, character, and military values	Recorded through conduct reports and superior evaluation	Overlaps with administrative compliance metrics; weak linkage to combat-specific competency
Teamwork and joint-unit coordination	Observed during combined-arms and joint exercises	Rarely calibrated across battalions/companies, producing inconsistent standards between units

Table 1. Competency Dimensions, Current Evaluation Practice, and Identified Gaps in TNI Combat Units

Strategic Levers for Strengthening Competency-Based Evaluation

Building on the identified gaps, four strategic levers emerged from the thematic analysis as the most consistently recommended by informants and most strongly supported by comparative literature.

First, standardized multi-source assessment instruments. Respondents across ranks favored replacing single-rater scoring with structured instruments incorporating peer input, subordinate feedback in training contexts, and self-assessment, mirroring practices shown to improve appraisal reliability in service-sector and public-enterprise case studies (Tavares & Vaz, 2025; Hanif et al., 2025). Such instruments would formalize what several commanders already do informally—consulting platoon leaders before finalizing scores—while creating an auditable evidentiary trail linked to specific training exercises and field performance rather than end-of-period impressions.

Second, digital performance dashboards. Several units already maintain paper-based or spreadsheet logs of training results, marksmanship scores, and fitness tests, but these are rarely integrated into a unified system accessible to both unit commanders and higher Kotama-level human resource planners. A digital, competency-indexed dashboard—drawing on the information-technology-mediated performance improvements documented at TNI Satkomlek (Lukman et al., 2022) would enable real-time tracking of competency trajectories, support early identification of personnel requiring remedial training, and reduce the administrative burden associated with end-of-cycle manual reporting.

Third, competency-linked career pathways. Consistent with talent management research identifying rigid, seniority-driven promotion as a structural bottleneck (Gati & Utomo, 2024), informants recommended more explicit linkage between documented competency attainment and eligibility for specialized courses, command assignments, and promotion boards. This would not eliminate seniority as a factor but would ensure that competency evidence carries demonstrable weight in career decisions, addressing concerns raised in comparative public-sector competency appraisal research about the risk of appraisal systems becoming symbolic rather than substantively influential (Widodo & Nugroho, 2023).

Fourth, periodic joint-command calibration forums. To address inter-unit inconsistency, respondents proposed regular cross-battalion or cross-brigade calibration sessions analogous to moderation meetings used in competency-based educational and public-sector assessment where commanders jointly review sample cases and align scoring standards before formal evaluation cycles begin. Such forums would also serve a secondary function of disseminating best practices in competency development, echoing recommendations from bureaucratic reform studies emphasizing coordinated implementation over isolated unit-level initiatives (Subroto & Indriati, 2024; Dongoran & Saputra, 2025).

Discussion in Relation to Broader TNI Institutional Reform

These findings should be interpreted within the broader trajectory of TNI institutional reform. Research on bureaucratic reform implementation has repeatedly shown that formal policy adoption in the TNI often outpaces operational-level capacity to translate policy into consistent practice (Rusyianto & Fathurrahman, 2025; Jatmiko & Prasojo, 2022) a pattern strongly mirrored in this study's finding of a gap between well-articulated formal competency dimensions and inconsistent field-level application. At the same time, the strong preference expressed by combat-unit personnel for competency-based over purely administrative evaluation suggests considerable latent institutional appetite for reform, provided that implementation mechanisms standardized instruments, digital infrastructure, and calibration processes are given adequate resourcing and command-level endorsement.

The findings also extend the literature on military leadership competency by demonstrating that leadership evaluation cannot be meaningfully separated from technical-tactical and physical-readiness competencies in combat settings, in contrast to studies focused on senior strategic leadership in isolation (Rahmawati et al., 2023; Yogaswara et al., 2023). Within combat units, leadership is evaluated not as an abstract trait but as an integrated capacity to make sound tactical decisions while managing subordinates' physical and psychological readiness under stress an operational nuance that purely leadership-centric or purely technical competency models, taken separately, fail to capture. This reinforces the study's core contention that combat-unit competency evaluation requires an integrated, context-specific framework rather than the adaptation of generic administrative or civilian-sector competency models.

Finally, the study's findings carry implications for human resource development beyond conventional combat units. Special-operations and counterterrorism capability-building programs, which have been shown to require highly specialized and continuously updated competency standards (Adriyanto & Timur, 2025), may benefit even more acutely from the standardized, digitally supported, and cross-unit-calibrated evaluation architecture proposed here, given the elevated operational stakes and the smaller, more specialized personnel pools involved. Taken together, these findings suggest that strengthening competency-based performance evaluation in TNI combat units is not merely a technical human resource adjustment but a strategic investment in the institution's overall combat readiness and long-term professionalization.

Triangulation and Credibility of Findings

To strengthen the credibility of these findings, results derived from interviews were systematically cross-checked against unit evaluation documents and field observation notes collected during training cycles. Where interview accounts of informal, single-rater scoring practices might otherwise be dismissed as isolated perceptions, document analysis independently confirmed that a substantial proportion of reviewed evaluation forms contained minimal narrative justification and were completed within a narrow window immediately preceding submission deadlines—corroborating the pattern reported by informants. Similarly, observed training exercises showed that although commanders informally solicited input from platoon and section leaders when assessing subordinates' tactical performance, this input was rarely documented in a form that could be traced back through the formal evaluation record, reinforcing the identified gap between informal good practice and formal instrument design. This convergence across data sources strengthens confidence that the identified gaps reflect systemic patterns rather than isolated unit-specific anomalies, while also indicating that the foundations for reform—informal multi-source consultation, commander willingness to differentiate performance, and personnel demand for fairer evaluation—already exist within the current system and require

formalization rather than wholesale reinvention. This is a critical distinction for policy design: the strategic levers proposed in this study are intended to formalize and scale existing informal good practices rather than impose an entirely unfamiliar evaluation paradigm, which increases the plausibility of successful adoption across diverse combat units operating under varying resource constraints and local command cultures within the Main Command structure.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how competency-based performance evaluation is designed, implemented, and experienced within combat units under a Main Command of the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), an operational domain that has remained underexamined relative to the substantial body of research on administrative, support, and senior-leadership contexts within the institution. Using a qualitative descriptive case study design, the findings show that combat units already possess a formal competency architecture spanning technical-tactical proficiency, physical readiness, leadership under stress, discipline and character, and teamwork, yet the application of this architecture remains fragmented, inconsistently calibrated across units, and only loosely integrated with career development and readiness planning systems.

At the same time, the study finds that personnel across ranks express clear support for competency-based evaluation over purely administrative appraisal, and that informal good practices such as commanders informally consulting subordinate leaders before finalizing assessments already provide a practical foundation upon which more formal mechanisms can be built. Four strategic levers emerged as the most viable pathways for strengthening the system: standardized multi-source assessment instruments, digital competency-indexed performance dashboards, explicit linkage between competency evidence and career progression, and periodic joint-command calibration forums to harmonize evaluation standards across battalions and companies.

Theoretically, this research extends competency-based human resource management scholarship into the underexplored context of combat-unit evaluation within a non-Western, hierarchical military institution, while empirically contributing a context-specific evaluation model grounded in the lived practice of TNI personnel rather than adapted wholesale from civilian or administrative competency frameworks. Practically, the proposed strategic levers offer TNI human resource planners and Main Command leadership an implementable pathway to strengthen evaluation consistency without requiring wholesale institutional restructuring, since they build upon practices already present, in nascent form, within the units studied.

As with any single-case qualitative study, these findings are context-bound and should be interpreted with appropriate caution regarding generalizability to combat units operating under different Main Commands, services, or operational specializations. Future research employing multi-site case comparisons across Army, Navy, and Air Force combat units, or longitudinal designs tracking the outcomes of implemented competency-based reforms, would further strengthen the evidentiary basis for TNI-wide performance evaluation policy. Nonetheless, this study offers a timely and empirically grounded contribution to ongoing efforts to professionalize human resource management within Indonesia's combat forces, reinforcing the strategic proposition that robust competency-based evaluation is not merely an administrative refinement but a foundational element of national defense readiness.

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