

Original Research Article

Merit-Based Recruitment in Indonesian Local Government: Implementation, Challenges, and Policy Lessons from West Kutai

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Abstract: Merit-based civil service recruitment is an important instrument for building a professional, objective, transparent, and accountable bureaucracy. However, its implementation at the local government level still faces institutional, technological, and accessibility challenges. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the merit system in the recruitment of State Civil Apparatus Candidates (CASN) in the West Kutai Regency Government based on PermenPANRB Number 6 of 2024 and identify supporting and inhibiting factors for its implementation. The study used a descriptive qualitative approach with the Van Meter and Van Horn policy implementation framework. Data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with 17 informants consisting of committee/implementers, successful and unsuccessful participants, and supported by documentation. Data were analyzed through coding, categorization, theme development, and thematic interpretation. The results show that the merit system has been implemented through needs planning based on Job Analysis and Workload Analysis, SSCASN, CAT BKN, value transparency, and determination of graduation based on scores and rankings. Implementation is supported by clear regulations, implementer competence, budget support, inter-agency coordination, and a digital system. However, limited local CAT facilities, distance to test locations, travel costs, uneven internet access, and varying quality of information services remain obstacles. Research concludes that the success of merit-based recruitment is determined not only by procedural objectivity but also by the institution's ability to provide equitable access throughout the recruitment process.

Keywords: Merit System, CASN Recruitment, Policy Implementation, Procedural Objectivity, Implementation Accessibility, Local Government.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Bureaucratic reforms in various countries increasingly place the merit system as a crucial foundation for building a professional, competent, and performance-oriented public apparatus. The merit system emphasizes that personnel decisions, including the recruitment process, must be based on qualifications, competency, and achievement, rather than on personal relationships, patronage, or political interests. International evidence shows that the application of the merit principle is associated with improved governance quality, bureaucratic professionalism, and a reduced risk of corruption in public administration (Meyer-Sahling *et al.*, 2018; Oliveira *et al.*, 2024). In Indonesia, this orientation is reinforced through Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning the State Civil Apparatus and Regulation of the Minister of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform Number 6 of

2024 concerning the Procurement of State Civil Apparatus. These regulations emphasize an objective, transparent, competitive, fair, and accountable civil servant procurement process. At the same time, digitalization through the State Civil Service Candidate Selection System (SSCASN), Computer Assisted Test (CAT), and electronic publication of selection results further strengthens the standardization and traceability of the recruitment process.

Although regulations and the use of technology have strengthened selection mechanisms, the implementation of merit systems at the local government level still faces implementation challenges. A technically objective selection system does not necessarily result in a fully equitable recruitment experience when applicants face limited digital infrastructure, differing access to information, unclear administrative requirements,

remote exam locations, or varying quality of information services. While government digitalization can increase transparency and public trust, these benefits are highly dependent on technological readiness, organizational capacity, and the public's ability to access digital services (Hwang & Jung, 2019; Virmandes *et al.*, 2024). In the context of West Kutai Regency, the CASN recruitment process has utilized SSCASN, the BKN CAT (National Civil Service Test), openness of scores, a complaint mechanism, and the determination of graduation based on scores and rankings. However, implementation still faces challenges such as limited CAT facilities in the region, inconsistent quality of information service responses, unequal internet access, and the burden of travel to exam locations. These conditions indicate that the success of a merit system is not solely measured by the objectivity of the selection mechanism, but also by the quality of implementation and the equality of access received by applicants.

Previous research has provided a strong foundation for understanding the importance of meritocracy in public administration. Meyer-Sahling *et al.*, (2018) demonstrated that merit-based recruitment can reduce the risk of corruption, while Meyer-Sahling *et al.*, (2022) emphasized that the success of civil service reform is influenced by institutional and political configurations. Oliveira *et al.*, (2024) systematically demonstrated that the merit principle has a positive relationship with government performance, while Mulaphong (2023) demonstrated that meritocracy is associated with better public organization outcomes across countries. From a selection perspective, perceptions of fairness and transparency are important factors in shaping legitimacy and trust in public employee recruitment (Ariely, 2021; Kim & Lee, 2020). In the Indonesian context, Nurmaya and Febrina (2021), Puspitasari (2022), and Ridwan *et al.*, (2024) have shown that the implementation of merit systems in local governments is still influenced by institutional capacity, social practices, and consistency in policy implementation. These findings suggest that meritocracy is an issue not only related to the design of the selection system, but also to the capacity of the bureaucracy to implement it.

However, gaps remain in the literature. Most international research primarily links meritocracy to corruption, professionalism, bureaucratic quality, or government performance at the macro level, while Indonesian research generally discusses the implementation of merit systems in general or focuses on the regulatory context prior to recent policy changes. Limited research specifically analyzes the implementation of CASN recruitment after the enactment of Ministerial Regulation No. 6 of 2024, integrating the perspectives of implementing organizations and the experiences of selection participants. Furthermore, technical aspects such as the use of CAT (Competency Testing), objection

mechanisms, consistency of information services, digital access gaps, examination facilities, and regional geographic characteristics have not been comprehensively analyzed as part of the policy implementation process. However, according to Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), successful implementation is determined not only by the clarity of policy standards but also by the adequacy of resources, interorganizational communication, the characteristics of implementing organizations, the disposition of implementers, and social, economic, and political conditions.

Based on these gaps, the novelty of this research lies in analyzing the merit system as a policy implementation issue at the local government level, rather than solely as a matter of design or compliance with recruitment procedures. This study uses Van Meter and Van Horn's (1975) six dimensions to explain how merit system regulations are translated into CASN recruitment practices, taking into account the relationship between policy standards, resource capacity, inter-agency coordination, organizational characteristics, implementer commitment, and environmental conditions. The analysis also incorporates the experiences of both successful and unsuccessful participants, allowing for an assessment of policy implementation from both the provider and recipient perspectives. With this approach, this study highlights two aspects that must be addressed simultaneously: the objectivity of selection procedures and the provider's ability to provide equal access and service. This perspective broadens the discussion of merit systems by demonstrating that technology can enhance objectivity and transparency, but the quality of implementation remains determined by institutional capacity and local context (Christensen & Lægheid, 2020; Oliveira *et al.*, 2024; Virmandes *et al.*, 2024).

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze the implementation of the merit system in the recruitment of prospective civil servants in the West Kutai Regency Government based on the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Regulation Number 6 of 2024 and identify factors that support and hinder its implementation. The Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) framework is used to explain how national policies are translated into recruitment practices at the local government level. This study is expected to provide an empirical contribution to the public administration literature by demonstrating that the success of merit-based civil service recruitment depends on the interaction between regulations, technology, organizational capacity, institutional coordination, implementer behavior, and environmental conditions. Practically, the research findings are expected to provide policy lessons for local governments in strengthening the civil service recruitment process to be more objective, transparent, accountable, and equitable.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Merit-Based Civil Service Recruitment

The merit system in public administration prioritizes qualifications, competence, integrity, and performance as the primary basis for personnel decisions. This approach is designed to reduce the dominance of patronage, political closeness, nepotism, and non-professional considerations in the civil service recruitment process. International literature shows that merit-based recruitment is associated with increased bureaucratic professionalism, reduced risks of corruption, and improved governance (Arellano-Gault, 2019; Meyer-Sahling *et al.*, 2018; Oliveira *et al.*, 2024). Cross-national findings also indicate that meritocracy tends to produce better public organization outcomes when supported by strong institutions and consistent selection mechanisms (Mulaphong, 2023; Yang & Zhao, 2024).

In the Indonesian context, the merit principle is reinforced through Law Number 20 of 2023 concerning the State Civil Apparatus and Regulation of the Minister of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Number 6 of 2024 concerning the Procurement of State Civil Apparatus. However, the existence of regulations does not always guarantee uniform implementation in local governments. Previous research shows that the effectiveness of merit-based recruitment is still influenced by organizational capacity, procedural consistency, implementer integrity, and institutional social dynamics (Nurmaya & Febrina, 2021; Puspitasari, 2022; Ridwan *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, merit-based recruitment needs to be understood not merely as a set of selection rules, but as an institutional practice that requires consistent implementation.

2.2 Transparency, Fairness, and Digitalization in Recruitment

Transparency and fairness are two crucial elements in public service recruitment because they influence the legitimacy of the process and participants' acceptance of the selection results. When the standards, stages, assessment criteria, and selection results are clearly understood, participants tend to perceive the process as fairer and more trustworthy. Ariely (2021) shows that perceptions of fairness in civil service exams are strongly influenced by the transparency of the selection mechanism, while Kim and Lee (2020) emphasize that transparency is closely linked to trust in the public sector recruitment process. Therefore, recruitment quality is determined not only by the selection results but also by how objective and accountable the process is perceived.

Digitalization enhances the potential for objectivity and transparency through standardization of registration, verification, testing, and publication of results. Digital systems can reduce direct human

intervention and improve decision traceability. However, the effectiveness of digitalization depends heavily on technological readiness, organizational capacity, and user access to the system (Hwang & Jung, 2019; Virnandes *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, digital recruitment should not be judged solely on technological sophistication but also on its ability to ensure relatively equal access, especially for participants facing limitations in network connectivity, digital literacy, devices, or geographic barriers.

2.3 Policy Implementation Perspective

The implementation of a merit system is largely determined by the government's ability to translate regulations into administrative practice. Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) explain that the success of policy implementation is influenced by six main dimensions: policy standards and objectives, resources, interorganizational communication, the characteristics of the implementing organization, the disposition of the implementer, and social, economic, and political conditions. This framework is relevant for analyzing CASN recruitment because the process of procuring civil servants involves formal regulations, implementing organizations, human resources, technology, inter-institutional coordination, and the social environment that can strengthen or hinder policy implementation.

From this perspective, the success of merit-based recruitment is not solely measured by administrative compliance with selection procedures. Organizational capacity, coordination quality, implementer competence, commitment to integrity, and external support also determine implementation quality. Christensen and Læg Reid (2020) demonstrate that civil service reform requires adequate administrative capacity for effective institutional change, while Meyer-Sahling *et al.*, (2022) emphasize that the outcomes of civil service reform are also influenced by the political and institutional context. Thus, Van Meter and Van Horn's framework allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the factors explaining the success and obstacles to merit system implementation.

2.4 Synthesis and Analytical Framework

Based on the literature, the success of merit-based civil servant recruitment is determined not only by regulations but also by the quality of implementation, organizational capacity, technology, and environmental conditions. A merit system contributes to bureaucratic professionalism, reduces the risk of corruption, and improves the quality of governance when supported by consistent implementation (Meyer-Sahling *et al.*, 2018; Mulaphong, 2023; Oliveira *et al.*, 2024). Therefore, this study uses the six dimensions of Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) as an analytical framework to assess the implementation of merit-based civil servant recruitment in West Kutai Regency.

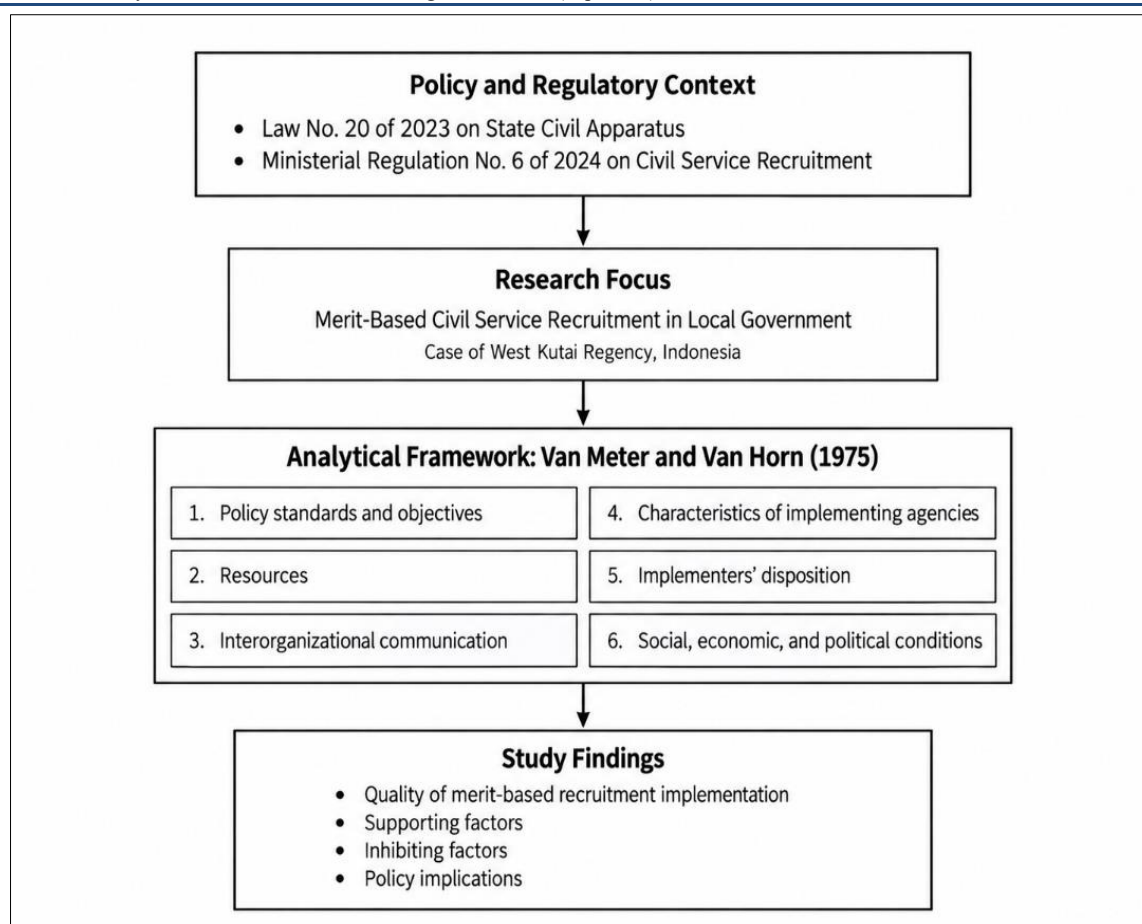


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Implementing Merit-Based ASN Recruitment

Source: Processed by researchers based on Van Meter and Van Horn (1975).

Figure 1 shows the relationship between the regulatory context, research focus, six dimensions of policy implementation, and the results of the analysis covering implementation quality, supporting factors, inhibiting factors, and policy implications.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the implementation of the merit system in the recruitment of State Civil Apparatus Candidates (CASN) in the West Kutai Regency Government. This approach was chosen because the research focuses on the policy implementation process, the experiences of the actors involved, and the factors that support and hinder implementation, rather than on examining the relationships between variables. The analysis refers to the six dimensions of policy implementation by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975): namely policy standards and objectives, resources, interorganizational communication, characteristics of implementing organizations, dispositions of implementers, and social, economic, and political

conditions. A qualitative approach allows for a deeper understanding of policy phenomena in their natural context (Creswell, 2018).

3.2 Research Location and Informants

The research was conducted in West Kutai Regency, specifically within the West Kutai Regency Government and the Human Resources Development and Personnel Agency (BKPSDM) involved in the implementation of CASN recruitment for the 2024 Fiscal Year. The location selection was based on the implementation of ASN procurement based on PermenPANRB Number 6 of 2024 as well as the institutional and geographical characteristics of the region that are relevant to analyzing the implementation of the merit system.

Informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement, knowledge, and experience in the CASN recruitment process. This selection allowed the study to gain perspectives from both the organizers and participants. The composition of informants and the codes used in presenting interview excerpts are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Research Informants and Citation Codes

Informant Group	Amount	Informant Code	Information Focus
CASN recruitment committee/implementer	6	IMP01–IMP06	Implementation of selection, merit system, coordination, resources, as well as supporting and inhibiting factors.
Participants who have passed	5	SP01–SP05	Selection experience, transparency, objectivity, fairness, access to information, and service.
Participants who did not pass	6	UP01–UP06	Perceptions of the selection process, transparency, objection period, access to information, and barriers to selection.
Total	17		

Source: Research data, 2026.

To maintain the confidentiality of informant identities, the codes in Table 1 are used consistently in presenting interview excerpts in the research results section.

3.3 Data Collection

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and documentation. Interviews were used to gather information regarding the implementation of the merit system, recruitment stages, objectivity and transparency of selection, participant experiences, and supporting and inhibiting factors for implementation. The semi-structured format allowed questions to remain focused on the research while also providing space for informants to explain their experiences in greater depth. Documentation included ASN procurement regulations, formation data, selection announcements, selection results, CASN implementation reports, and relevant administrative documents. These documents were used to verify and strengthen the information from the interviews (Creswell, 2018).

3.4 Data Analysis and Validity

Data analysis was conducted through organizing and transcribing data, reading the entire information, initial coding, developing categories, developing themes, and interpreting the findings. Initial coding was conducted openly to identify patterns and units of meaning emerging from the data. The resulting categories were then deductively mapped onto the six dimensions of policy implementation outlined by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975). The findings were then presented thematically, compared with policy documents, and interpreted within the context of merit system implementation. The validity of the findings was strengthened through triangulation of sources and documentation, limited member checking, and repeated verification of the patterns to enhance credibility and consistency of interpretation (Miles *et al.*, 2014).

4. RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that the implementation of the merit system in the CASN recruitment for Fiscal Year 2024 in the West Kutai Regency Government has generally been conducted objectively, transparently, competitively, and

accountably. However, several obstacles remain in the selection facilities, information services, digital access, and geographic conditions. The findings are presented based on six dimensions of policy implementation used as an analytical framework. Informant codes in the quotations refer to Table 1.

4.1 Policy Standards and Targets

Policy standards and objectives have been implemented since the employee needs planning stage through Job Analysis and Workload Analysis, followed by formation announcements, administrative verification through SSCASN, CAT-based competency selection, and determination of graduation based on grades and rankings. This mechanism minimizes discretion in determining selection results and strengthens the objectivity of the process.

"Our objectivity is key by minimizing human intervention in the assessment." (IMP03, interview)

Although the core standards have been clearly implemented, there are concerns regarding the details of the administrative requirements and the consistency of their application during the appeal period. Thus, the dimensions of the standards and policy objectives generally support the implementation of a merit system, but consistency at the administrative level is still needed.

4.2 Resource

The recruitment process is supported by the committee's human resources, local government budgets, SSCASN, the National Civil Service Agency (BKN) CAT (Competency Testing), live scores, and various information service facilities. Digital systems are a key resource, enabling a more standardized and traceable registration, verification, assessment, and publication of results. However, the CAT facilities in West Kutai Regency do not yet meet the required standards, so the exam is being held in Samarinda.

"Because the verification results of the CAT facilities and infrastructure in West Kutai did not meet the required standards, the selection process was carried out in Samarinda." (IMP05, interview)

This situation has consequences for participants in the form of additional transportation costs, accommodation, and travel time. Thus, while technological and administrative resources have supported the implementation of the merit system, local selection infrastructure readiness is not yet fully optimal.

4.3 Inter-organizational Communication and Implementation Activities

Communication and coordination between the BKPSDM, BKN, the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (PANRB), regional government agencies, and supervisory agencies are conducted through coordination meetings, official letters, technical consultations, and digital communication systems. Information is delivered to participants via the website, social media, the SSCASN portal, WhatsApp, Telegram, and a helpdesk. This multi-channel communication model facilitates the dissemination of schedules, regulations, and changes to information throughout the selection process.

"The information provided by the BKPSDM regional committee regarding the selection schedule and rules is quite clear and easy to follow." (SP04, interview)

While key information was readily accessible, some participants still found that explanations of technical issues were not always detailed, and service responses were not entirely consistent. These findings suggest that one-way communication is relatively effective, while the quality of two-way communication still needs to be strengthened.

4.4 Characteristics of the Implementing Organization

The recruitment process is supported by a work structure involving the National Selection Committee and Regional Selection Committees, a formal division of tasks, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and oversight by the Inspectorate/APIP and the National Civil Service Agency (BKN). The use of SSCASN and CAT also strengthens process standardization and reduces reliance on manual decisions. From the participant's perspective, the selection process is considered orderly and in accordance with established procedures.

"The entire series of selection stages, from administrative selection, Basic Competency Selection, to Field Competency Selection, have been carried out very smoothly." (SP02, interview)

In general, the characteristics of the implementing organizations have supported the implementation of a merit system. However, there is still a need to strengthen the consistency of administrative verification, helpdesk capacity, and provide more accessible selection facilities for participants.

4.5 Disposition or Attitude of the Executor

The committee demonstrated a positive attitude toward the implementation of the merit system, reflected in its commitment to objectivity, transparency, integrity, and non-discrimination. The use of CAT and digital selection mechanisms also helped maintain the integrity of the process, as participants' scores could not be unilaterally changed by the regional committee.

"The integrity of the implementers is the main foundation for ensuring that the selection process is fair and credible." (IMP06, interview)

Interview findings also did not indicate any special treatment or practices that directly contradict the principle of merit. However, consistency of attitude among implementers is still required at all stages, particularly administrative verification, appeals processing, and participant filing.

4.6 Social, Economic, and Political Conditions

Social and political conditions generally support merit-based recruitment. Results are determined based on CAT scores, integrated scores, and rankings, and there is no indication of direct political interference in determining success. However, the geographic characteristics of West Kutai Regency pose challenges for some applicants, particularly those from remote areas.

"Several inland sub-districts are still experiencing problems with internet signal stability and electricity supply." (IMP03, interview)

In addition to network limitations, distance to the exam location and travel costs create different burdens for participants. Several participants also expressed their desire for work experience, community service, or regional origin to be considered in recruitment policies. These findings indicate that uniform selection standards do not always translate into equal access.

4.7 Synthesis of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Overall, supporting factors for the implementation of the merit system include clear regulations, leadership commitment, committee competence, budget support, inter-institutional coordination, and the use of SSCASN and CAT BKN. Conversely, inhibiting factors include limited local CAT facilities, remote test locations, travel costs, uneven internet coverage, some technical requirements that are not yet sufficiently detailed, and helpdesk services that are not yet fully uniform.

"Locations far from West Kutai require significant transportation and accommodation costs." (SP04, interview)

These findings demonstrate that procedural objectivity in recruitment has been relatively well established, but implementation accessibility is not yet

fully equal. In other words, the application of uniform standards and selection systems has strengthened merit-based recruitment, while geographic, digital, and economic conditions continue to create variations in participants' experiences in accessing the selection process.

To provide a more concise overview of the results of the implementation of the merit system in CASN recruitment in West Kutai Regency, the findings on the six dimensions of policy implementation are summarized in Table 2. The summary shows aspects that have supported the implementation of the merit system as well as areas that still need strengthening.

Table 2: Summary of Findings of Merit System Implementation

Dimensions	Key Findings	Interpretation of Findings
Policy standards and objectives	Procedures, CAT, marks and rankings have been implemented; There are still notes on the administration and objection period	The standards are relatively clear, but consistency of implementation still needs to be strengthened.
Resource	Human resources, budget, SSCASN, and CAT support; local CAT facilities do not meet standards	Resources are supportive, but local infrastructure is not yet optimal.
Inter-organizational communication	Inter-agency coordination and multi-channel communication are ongoing; technical responses are not always uniform.	Communication is effective, but two-way communication needs to be strengthened
Characteristics of the implementing organization	Structure, SOP, division of tasks, and supervision are available	Organizational structure supports implementation
Disposition of the executor	Commitment to objectivity, transparency, integrity and non-discrimination is relatively strong.	The implementer's attitude supports the merit system
Social, economic and political conditions	No direct political intervention was found; geography, cost, and digital access remain barriers.	The socio-political environment is supportive, but access is not yet fully equal.

Source: Research data, 2026.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Policy Standards and Targets

The results of the study indicate that CASN recruitment standards and targets have been implemented through needs planning based on Job Analysis and Workload Analysis, SSCASN, CAT, and determination of graduation based on grades and rankings. These findings indicate that the principle of merit has been translated from regulations into a relatively measurable selection procedure and limits subjectivity in determining results. These findings align with Meyer-Sahling *et al.*, (2018), who demonstrated that merit recruitment can reduce patronage and the risk of corruption, and Oliveira *et al.*, (2024), who confirmed the relationship between the principle of merit and the quality of government administration.

However, the continued lack of clarity in some administrative requirements and differing perceptions regarding the objection period indicate that the existence of standards does not always guarantee consistent implementation. This situation can be explained by Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), who emphasized the importance of clear policy standards that are uniformly understood by implementers. This finding also supports Nurmaya and Febrina (2021) and Puspitasari (2022), who argued that the success of merit systems in local governments remains influenced by the bureaucracy's ability to translate regulations into practice. Consequently, administrative instructions and objection

mechanisms need to be standardized to ensure consistent objectivity from the administrative stage to the determination of results.

5.2 Resource

The findings indicate that committee competence, budget support, SSCASN, CAT BKN, and live scores are key resources supporting the implementation of the merit system. However, CAT facilities in West Kutai Regency do not meet standards, so the exam is being held in Samarinda. This finding suggests that implementation capacity depends not only on human resources and technology but also on the readiness of local infrastructure. This is consistent with Christensen and Lægreid (2020), who emphasize the importance of administrative capacity in public service reform, and Hwang and Jung (2019), who suggest that the benefits of technology depend on organizational readiness.

This situation indicates a disparity between the capacity of the national digital system and the capacity of regional infrastructure. The selection system can be objective digitally, but limited local facilities still result in additional costs and travel burdens for participants. This finding aligns with Virnandes *et al.*, (2024), who demonstrated that the success of government digital transformation is heavily influenced by institutional capacity and technological readiness. Consequently, strengthening the merit system requires the development

of local CAT facilities, network and electricity stability, and technical support so that the benefits of digitalization not only increase objectivity but also participant accessibility.

5.3 Inter-organizational Communication and Implementation Activities

The study results show that communication between the BKPSDM, BKN, the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform (PANRB), regional apparatus, and supervisory elements has taken place through coordination meetings, official letters, technical consultations, and various digital channels. Information to participants was also delivered through the website, SSCASN, social media, WhatsApp, Telegram, and helpdesk. These findings indicate that multi-channel communication has supported the transparency and consistency of information throughout the recruitment process. These results support Van Meter and Van Horn (1975) regarding the importance of interorganizational communication, as well as Kim and Lee (2020) who place information transparency as a crucial element in building trust in public recruitment.

However, the existence of multiple channels does not fully guarantee quality communication, as helpdesk responses were still found to be inconsistent, not always prompt, detailed, and consistent. This finding suggests that policy communication is not only related to the availability of information but also to the organization's ability to mitigate participant uncertainty. This is relevant to Ariely (2021), who emphasized the importance of fairness in the public employee selection process. Consequently, local governments need to establish helpdesk response standards, regularly update FAQs, and ensure all staff provide consistent interpretations of technical requirements.

5.4 Characteristics of the Implementing Organization

The findings indicate that recruitment implementation is supported by the division of roles between the National Selection Committee and Regional Selection Committees, the existence of standard operating procedures (SOPs), a formal division of responsibilities, and oversight by the Inspectorate/APIP and the National Civil Service Agency (BKN). These conditions indicate that the institutional structure has provided a relatively strong foundation for standardized and accountable recruitment implementation. These results align with Christensen and Lægveid (2020), who emphasize that administrative reform requires organizational capacity and clear accountability mechanisms.

However, the existence of structures and SOPs does not automatically guarantee quality implementation if service capacity and consistency of implementation vary. Findings regarding helpdesks, administrative verification, and selection facilities indicate that organizational effectiveness is also determined by the

ability to consistently apply procedures. This supports Meyer-Sahling *et al.*, (2022), who asserted that the outcomes of civil service reform are influenced by how institutions operationalize formal rules. Consequently, evaluations of implementing organizations need to encompass not only structures and SOPs, but also consistency of decisions, responsiveness of service, and the ability to resolve issues during the selection process.

5.5 Disposition or Attitude of the Executor

The results of the study indicate that implementers generally have a commitment to objectivity, transparency, integrity, and non-discrimination. Technologies such as CAT and SSCASN reinforce this attitude by limiting the possibility of unilateral changes in scores and decisions. These findings suggest that system integrity and implementer integrity complement each other in maintaining the credibility of the selection process. These results are consistent with Meyer-Sahling *et al.*, (2018), who demonstrated that merit systems can reduce the scope for patronage and intervention in public administration.

However, not all recruitment stages can be automated, as administrative verification, objection handling, and filing still involve human judgment. Therefore, the disposition of the implementer remains a crucial factor even as systems become increasingly digitized. This finding is relevant to Ridwan *et al.*, (2024), who showed that merit practices in Indonesia persist within a social and institutional context that can influence their implementation. Consequently, integrity strengthening needs to be implemented through integrity pacts, training, decision documentation, multi-layered oversight, and standardization of administrative processes.

5.6 Social, Economic, and Political Conditions

The findings indicate that the selection process is relatively free from direct political interference, and that graduation is determined by grades and rankings. However, geographical conditions, limited internet and electricity connections, distance to the exam location, and transportation and accommodation costs still impose different burdens on participants. This finding suggests that fairness in the assessment mechanism does not always result in equality in access to the selection process. This finding aligns with Van Meter and Van Horn (1975), who identified the social, economic, and political environment as important factors in the success of policy implementation.

Furthermore, the emergence of aspirations regarding the priority of local people, work experience, and dedication demonstrates a discrepancy between the principle of open competition in the merit system and the social expectations of local communities. This can be explained by the fact that national policy prioritizes qualifications and competencies as the basis for selection, while local communities also consider aspects

of engagement and contribution to the region. Consequently, these aspirations should not be accommodated through intervention in selection results, but rather through employee needs planning, local competency development, and formation policies that remain in line with the principles of merit and equal opportunity.

5.7 Procedural Objectivity and Accessibility of Implementation

The synthesis of findings reveals two key constraints in the implementation of merit systems. First, the SSCASN, CAT, live scores, assessment standards, and rankings have established relatively strong procedural objectivity. Second, limitations in local CAT facilities, distance from exam locations, travel costs, unequal digital access, and variations in information services indicate that implementation accessibility is not yet fully equal. These findings suggest that selection systems can be objective in determining outcomes, but participants do not necessarily face the same conditions when accessing the process. This perspective complements Oliveira *et al.*, (2024) and Mulaphong (2023), who emphasize the benefits of merit systems, and

Virnandes *et al.*, (2024), who demonstrate the importance of digital capacity in the quality of public services.

This situation can be explained by the difference between procedural integrity and access to procedures. Digital standardization can strengthen fairness at the assessment stage, but geographic, economic, technological, and service factors still determine how easily participants can participate in the selection process. Therefore, the empirical contribution of this research does not establish a new theory, but rather demonstrates that the success of merit-based civil service recruitment in local governments needs to be assessed through two complementary aspects: procedural objectivity and implementation accessibility. Consequently, ASN recruitment reforms need to maintain the integrity and transparency of the selection system while reducing access barriers stemming from geographic, technological, administrative, and service factors. The relationship between the strength of procedural objectivity and the limitations of implementation accessibility is visually summarized in Figure 2.

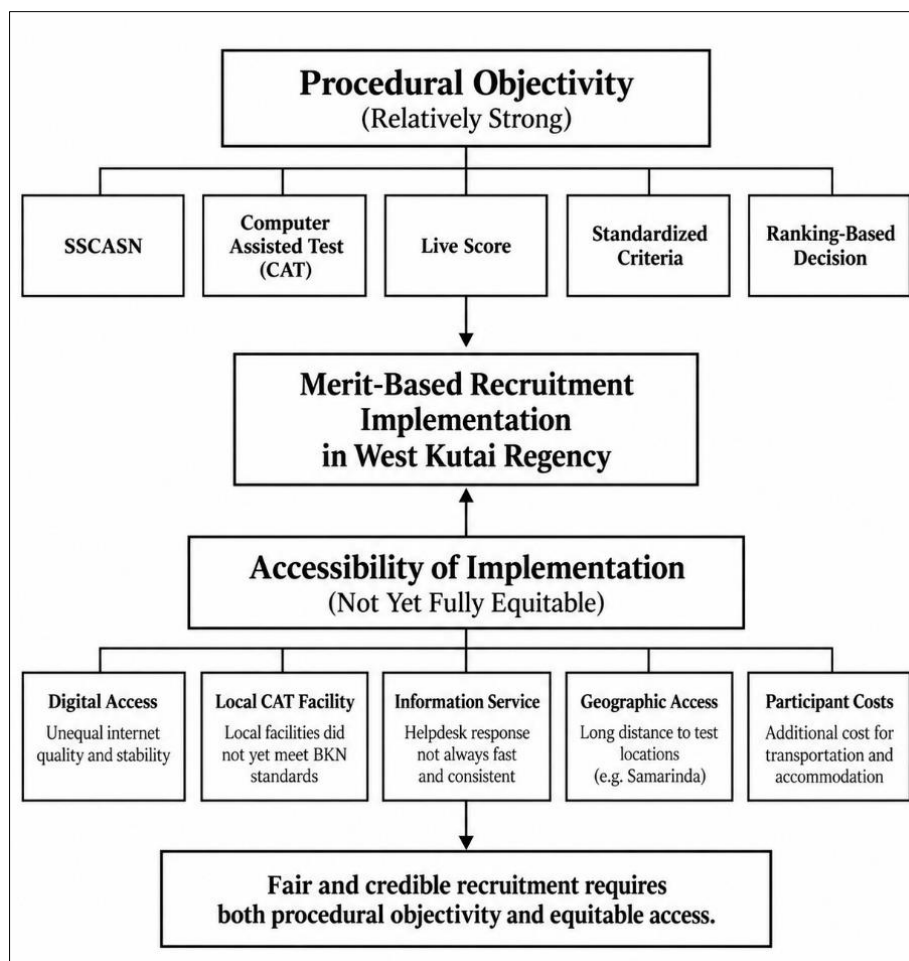


Figure 2: Synthesis of Findings on Merit-Based Civil Service Recruitment Implementation

Source: Developed by the authors based on the study findings.

6. CONCLUSION

This study shows that the implementation of the merit system in CASN recruitment in the West Kutai Regency Government has generally been carried out objectively, transparently, competitively, and accountably through the use of SSCASN, CAT BKN, live scores, assessment standards, and determination of graduation based on grades and rankings. This implementation is supported by clear policy standards, implementer competence, budget support, inter-agency coordination, organizational structure, and a commitment to integrity. However, limited local CAT facilities, distance from the test location, travel costs, uneven internet access, variations in the quality of information services, and several technical uncertainties still cause differences in participants' experiences in accessing the selection process. The empirical contribution of this study shows that the success of merit-based civil service recruitment at the local government level is not only determined by procedural objectivity, but also by the institution's ability to provide equitable access to the recruitment process.

Practically, the research findings imply the need for local governments to maintain the integrity of digital systems and standardize selection processes while strengthening local CAT facilities, network and electricity stability, consistency of administrative verification, and the quality of helpdesk services. This research is limited to one local government and one recruitment period, so the findings are heavily influenced by the institutional and geographic contexts and implementation conditions in West Kutai Regency. Furthermore, the study has not quantitatively measured the level of accessibility, perceptions of fairness, or the impact of merit-based recruitment on the quality of civil servants after being hired. Future research is recommended to conduct comparative studies across regions, using quantitative or mixed methods approaches, and to examine the relationship between procedural objectivity, accessibility, perceptions of fairness, public trust, and long-term civil servant performance.

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