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MERITOCRACY IN PUBLIC SECTOR GOVERNANCE: CHALLENGES AND POLICY SOLUTIONS IN OGAN KOMERING ULU

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Abstract-

This study explores the challenges and opportunities in implementing a merit-based system within Ogan Komering Ulu Regency's public sector. Using qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews and document analysis, we identify key factors influencing merit-based governance adoption. The findings highlight several obstacles, such as limited resources, political influence, and a lack of understanding among stakeholders, which hinder the full implementation of the merit system. Despite efforts to promote fair, competency-based management, these challenges affect the professionalism and effectiveness of public administration. To overcome these barriers, the study recommends strategies such as leadership training, improved resource allocation, and capacity-building programs for civil servants. This research offers actionable steps for local governments to foster sustainable, merit-based governance in the public sector.

INTRODUCTION

Merit-based public sector reform is essential for improving governance, especially in developing countries where political influence and resource constraints often undermine administrative efficiency. In Indonesia, the Civil Servant Law Number 20 (2023) enforces meritocratic principles, emphasizing competency-based recruitment,

promotion, and evaluation to foster a professional civil service. Despite these national reforms, local governments, including Ogan Komering Ulu Regency, face significant challenges in implementing merit-based systems due to resource limitations, entrenched political interests, and insufficient understanding among stakeholders.

While previous research has explored the potential and limitations of meritocratic reforms in Indonesia, few studies focus on the unique challenges faced by regencies like Ogan Komering Ulu. This study seeks to fill this gap by addressing two key research questions: (1) What specific challenges hinder the implementation of a merit-based system in Ogan Komering Ulu Regency? (2) What practical strategies can support local governments in overcoming these challenges.

This research focuses on analyzing these barriers and proposing actionable recommendations for local governments to effectively implement merit-based governance. By examining the specific socio-political context of Ogan Komering Ulu, the study aims to offer insights into the localized application of meritocracy in decentralized governance systems.

Public sector management reform, particularly in developing countries, is a pivotal initiative for enhancing the quality of governance and administration. This reform is often underscored by the adoption of a merit-based system, which prioritizes qualifications, competencies, and performance as the criteria for civil servant recruitment, promotion, and evaluation (Alimuddin et al., 2024; Sartono, 2023; Vincent Simandjorang & Kurniawan, 2022). The Government of Indonesia has introduced a merit-based system to foster professionalism and efficiency within the civil service, as stipulated in the updated Civil Servant Law Number 20 of the year 2023 (Ridwan et al., 2024; Sudrajat et al., 2024). However, the implementation of meritocracy within Indonesia's local governments encounters various obstacles, including limited resources, political interference, and inconsistent policy application, which affect the overall effectiveness of public administration (Nurnadhifa & Syahrina, 2021).

Previous studies highlight both the potential benefits and challenges of applying merit-based governance in Indonesia. For example, Abdulnabi (Abdulnabi, 2024) and Tumanggor and Nurdin (Tumanggor & Nurdin, 2024) found that political interference and limited understanding among local officials hinder the effective adoption of merit systems in West Pasaman Regency. Another study (Chariah et al., 2020) noted that, while the national government has made strides toward merit-based civil service

reforms, the oversight by Indonesia's Civil Service Commission (KASN) remains underutilized in ensuring local governments adhere to these standards. This study provides a distinctive analysis of merit-based governance within the context of Ogan Komering Ulu Regency, identifying specific challenges and practical approaches for overcoming them. Unlike previous studies that have primarily focused on broad national-level perspectives or other regions, this research addresses local barriers, such as leadership dynamics and resource limitations, which uniquely impact the effective implementation of meritocratic policies.

Merit-based reforms are seen globally as a strategy to optimize human resources by prioritizing qualifications, competencies, and performance over seniority or favouritism. Countries like New Zealand and the United Kingdom have successfully integrated merit-based systems to improve public sector transparency, accountability, and employee motivation (Berge & Torsteinsen, 2022; C.-M. Park et al., 2022). In contrast, developing countries face obstacles such as political resistance, resource scarcity, and inadequate infrastructure, which challenge the consistency of meritocratic processes (LIU, 2024; Morley et al., 2021; Steed et al., 2020).

In Indonesia, the introduction of merit-based civil service reforms, particularly through the updated Civil Servant Law, aims to eliminate political biases and focus on professionalism. However, the decentralized administrative structure of Indonesia means that implementation varies widely across regions, with local governments facing challenges in adapting these national standards to their unique contexts. The government's Civil Service Commission (KASN) has launched initiatives to support local authorities in adopting meritocratic practices, but significant obstacles remain at the local level, including political interference and a lack of awareness among civil servants (Nurnadhifa & Syahrina, 2021). By identifying the unique hurdles and potential enablers of meritocracy in Ogan Komering Ulu, this study provides valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners looking to improve public sector management in decentralized settings. The findings will help shape future reforms, offering a blueprint for more effective, transparent, and equitable public administration in Indonesia and other developing regions.

Furthermore, previous research (Azzizah et al., 2024; J. Park, 2021; Rusdiyani & Prasajo, 2023) on merit system application demonstrates that factors such as limited understanding among civil servants, budgetary constraints, and entrenched local

customs have hampered the effectiveness of meritocratic governance. The study illustrates how regional politics and existing power dynamics can skew policy implementation, particularly when the merit system conflicts with informal hierarchical structures or political expectations. This reflects broader findings by some researchers (Berge & Torsteinsen, 2022; C.-M. Park et al., 2022; van Dorp & Hart, 2019), who argue that developing regions often face challenges in depoliticizing public sector administration, a prerequisite for meritocratic success. Another relevant study (Suryanto & Darto, 2020) emphasizes the merit system's importance in fostering equal opportunities and transparent processes for career progression. The authors highlight that a merit-based system can improve public service morale and productivity by creating a work environment where civil servants feel their skills and contributions are valued. However, their findings also highlight that without adequate technological infrastructure and data systems, achieving transparency and accountability in merit-based assessments becomes difficult. This perspective aligns (with Chariah et al., 2020), who emphasized that digital systems such as e-performance and electronic HR databases are essential for effective merit-based administration in public sectors.

This research contributes to the literature by focusing on the localized implementation of a merit-based system in Ogan Komering Ulu, specifically addressing the nuanced challenges that arise within a regional governance structure. Unlike other studies that have focused on either national-level implementations or success stories in metropolitan areas, this study considers the unique socio-economic and political conditions of Ogan Komering Ulu, a regency where limited resources, political dynamics, and structural rigidity pose distinct challenges. By analyzing both the hindrances and enablers within this setting, the study offers a contextualized understanding of how meritocracy can be adapted to fit the needs of smaller, decentralized governments while also identifying the gaps that require national-level support.

The study also introduces an innovative perspective on policy application by proposing a model that integrates merit-based practices with adaptive leadership training, stakeholder engagement, and technology infrastructure enhancement. This model can provide a blueprint for other regencies facing similar challenges in Indonesia, offering a localized yet adaptable framework for meritocratic governance. Additionally, by addressing both policy and operational dimensions, the study contributes a

comprehensive approach to public sector reform in decentralized administrations, providing insights that can inform future studies and policy initiatives in public administration, especially in developing countries.

This study holds significant implications for the field of public administration and policy, particularly in the context of decentralization and regional governance. As Indonesia's government encourages local authorities to adopt reformative policies like merit-based civil service management, it is crucial to understand the limitations that prevent consistent application across diverse regions. This research underscores the need for a flexible meritocratic model that accommodates local realities, which may include limited budgets, variable administrative capabilities, and socio-political dynamics that differ from the national perspective. For practitioners and policymakers, the study offers a practical model that can serve as a roadmap for regional administrations. By highlighting both successes and shortfalls within Ogan Komering Ulu, the research provides concrete recommendations for improving public service motivation, transparency, and productivity through merit-based policies. These findings can guide future policy adjustments, helping local governments nationwide to achieve a more equitable, competent, and efficient civil service system.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative, phenomenological approach to understand the nuanced experiences of stakeholders involved in implementing a merit-based governance system within the Ogan Komering Ulu Regency. This choice is particularly relevant given the study's focus on the unique challenges encountered at the local government level, where quantitative methods, such as surveys, may fall short of capturing the underlying complexities and specific sociopolitical dynamics that shape policy application. By directly engaging with the lived experiences of local administrators, this approach provides rich, contextual insights into how these challenges affect the functioning and reception of meritocratic policies in a decentralized setting. To improve readability, the method section is organized into four main parts: Research Approach, Data Collection, Data Analysis, and Validation of Findings. Each subsection offers a condensed yet focused explanation of the processes, tools, and analytical techniques used, with an emphasis on how these choices enhance the study's credibility and depth.

Research Approach

A phenomenological approach was selected due to its suitability for capturing individual perspectives and contextual insights in the public sector, where governance and administrative policies are often influenced by both personal experiences and collective organizational dynamics. Unlike quantitative surveys, which may provide generalizable but limited insights, phenomenology allows the researcher to delve deeply into the participants' perceptions, thereby uncovering subtle factors impacting policy success. This method is particularly relevant in Ogan Komering Ulu, where local dynamics—such as political influence and resource constraints—require a deep, qualitative understanding that goes beyond numerical data.

Through phenomenology, the study seeks to explore how merit-based governance is perceived, implemented, and challenged at the local level. This approach allows for a detailed exploration of participants' experiences, which is essential for addressing the study's main objectives: identifying specific local challenges and formulating context-sensitive recommendations. The insights gained from this method are expected to provide a nuanced foundation for understanding and addressing meritocratic policy gaps within decentralized governance structures.

Data Collection

Data were collected over a three-month period, focusing on three primary sources: in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observations.

1. **In-Depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key stakeholders, including local government officials, public service employees, and representatives from regulatory bodies such as the Indonesian Civil Service Commission (KASN). The interviews were designed to capture participants' perspectives on the implementation of merit-based policies, as well as the barriers and enablers influencing these policies within the local government. Interview questions were developed to elicit insights into their experiences with the merit system, any challenges encountered, and suggestions for improvement. Triangulation was used to enhance the credibility of findings by cross-checking responses with data from other sources.
2. **Document Analysis:** Relevant documents—including policy guidelines, organizational reports, and government performance evaluation records—were analyzed to provide a structural context for understanding the merit system within

Ogan Komering Ulu. This document analysis helped establish a foundational understanding of the local governance framework and identified inconsistencies between policy intentions and practical implementation.

3. **Observations:** Field observations were conducted in local government offices to examine administrative practices, resource allocation, and day-to-day interactions among personnel. Observations provided insights into organizational culture and helped identify areas where policy implementation diverged from established guidelines.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involved several qualitative techniques to systematically examine, categorize, and interpret the collected data, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting merit-based governance.

1. **Thematic Analysis:** All data were coded and categorized into recurring themes using thematic analysis. Codes such as “political interference,” “resource limitations,” and “policy gaps” were used to classify data, allowing for the identification of major themes relevant to the study’s objectives. This analysis provided a structured way to group findings into overarching themes related to policy application, stakeholder perceptions, and actionable recommendations.
2. **SWOT Analysis:** To assess internal and external factors influencing merit-based policy success, a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis was conducted. This framework identified core strengths, such as a commitment to meritocracy, and highlighted weaknesses like limited resources and political pressures. The SWOT analysis provided a structured overview of the region’s capabilities and challenges, offering insights into areas for improvement and potential opportunities for strengthening governance.
3. **Gap Analysis:** A gap analysis compared the documented merit policy framework with actual practices observed in Ogan Komering Ulu. By identifying discrepancies between policy intentions and local implementation, this analysis pinpointed specific areas—such as performance evaluation and recruitment—that require enhanced consistency and accountability. The gap analysis was instrumental in formulating targeted recommendations to align policy and practice.
4. **Stakeholder Analysis:** Stakeholder analysis mapped the roles, interests, and influence of various actors within the merit system, including government officials,

policymakers, and civil servants. This mapping provided insight into how stakeholder dynamics shape policy implementation and identified opportunities for fostering stronger commitment to merit-based governance principles. Understanding these interactions was essential for developing recommendations on enhancing collaboration and minimizing political interference.

Each of these analyses contributed to a holistic understanding of merit-based governance in Ogan Komering Ulu by linking thematic findings to actionable recommendations. Themes were further organized into categories, such as “Implementation Challenges,” “Stakeholder Perceptions,” and “Recommendations for Improvement,” to provide clarity and coherence in presenting the research results.

Validation of Findings

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, several techniques were applied:

1. **Triangulation:** By using multiple data sources—interviews, document analysis, and observations—triangulation enhanced the credibility of the study’s findings. Cross-referencing data from these different sources helped to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and reduced the risk of researcher bias.
2. **Member Checking:** A subset of participants was invited to review the preliminary findings to confirm that the interpretations accurately reflected their experiences and perceptions. This member-checking process allowed participants to validate or clarify points as needed, which added an additional layer of credibility to the data.
3. **Comparative Analysis:** This analysis examined differences between ideal merit-based policies and actual practices observed within the local government, identifying areas where policy application diverged from its intended objectives. Comparative analysis helped refine recommendations by aligning them with gaps in policy practice that were specific to the local context.

Through these validation techniques, the study ensured that its conclusions were grounded in reliable and comprehensive data. The structured approach to validation also helped mitigate any potential limitations in the data collection process, such as researcher bias or the limited scope of observation.

In summary, this research adopted a qualitative, phenomenological approach to examine the complex challenges and opportunities associated with implementing a merit-based system within Ogan Komering Ulu’s public sector. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observations, providing a well-

rounded perspective on the factors affecting local governance. Analysis techniques—including thematic analysis, SWOT, gap analysis, and stakeholder analysis—were employed to identify core issues and inform targeted recommendations. Validation strategies, such as triangulation and member checking, enhanced the credibility of findings, ensuring that the study provides an accurate, comprehensive view of the merit-based governance landscape in Ogan Komering Ulu. By focusing on the unique challenges within a decentralized governance setting, this research contributes valuable insights into how meritocracy can be adapted to meet the needs of local governments in Indonesia. The findings highlight the importance of a contextualized approach to public administration reform, where policy adaptations are informed by the specific sociopolitical and resource constraints of each region.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a summarized analysis of the merit-based governance system in Ogan Komering Ulu, organized into four main areas: Merit System Status, Implementation Challenges, Strategic Interventions, and Practical Recommendations. By condensing the discussion into these concise subsections, the focus remains on key insights, offering readers a clear understanding of the main findings and their implications for public sector management.

The assessment of the merit system in Ogan Komering Ulu reveals a foundational but incomplete implementation. The region received a score of 191.5 from the Indonesian Civil Service Commission (KASN), placing it in the “less satisfactory” category. While certain policies are in place, significant gaps in alignment with national merit standards remain. Key merit principles—such as competency-based recruitment, impartial performance evaluation, and structured career development—are not consistently upheld, affecting the overall efficacy of public administration. This baseline assessment underscores the need for targeted improvements in line with national expectations for merit-based civil service management.

Table 1. Highest Top 10 Merit Score Among Indonesia’s Provinces 2023-2024

Provincial Governments	Merit System Value
West Java Province	396,5 (Very Good)
South Sulawesi Province	337,5 (Very Good)
Bali Province	386,5 (Very Good)

Jakarta Special Capital Region Province	335,5 (Very Good)
East Java Province	353,0 (Very Good)
North Sumatra Province	333,5 (Very Good)
Government of Special Region of Yogyakarta	349,0 (Very Good)
West Sumatera Province	332,0 (Very Good)
Central Java Province	340,5 (Very Good)
East Nusa Tenggara Province	331,0 (Very Good)

Source: Proceed from <https://www.kasn.go.id>, 2 February 2024

Table 1 describes West Java Province as having the highest merit system score with 396.5, which falls into the 'Very Good' category. Meanwhile, East Nusa Tenggara Province has the 10th device score among the 10 provinces with a score of 331.0, but still in the 'Very Good' category.

The implementation of the merit-based system in Ogan Komering Ulu's public sector is currently rated as "less satisfactory." Based on a recent evaluation by KASN, they received a score of 191.5, indicating a suboptimal alignment with the national standards for merit-based governance. The assessment criteria include recruitment based on competency, impartial performance evaluations, and structured employee development programs. However, many areas fall short of these benchmarks, impacting overall effectiveness.

Table 2. Highest Top 10 Merit Score Among Indonesia's Districts/Cities 2023- 2024

District/City Government	Merit System Score
Tangerang City	366,0 (Very Good)
Bandung City	359,5 (Very Good)
Tangerang Regency	350,5 (Very Good)
Sijunjung Regency	348,0 (Very Good)
Sumedang Regency	344,0 (Very Good)
Bogor City	344,0 (Very Good)
Surabaya City	341,5 (Very Good)
Pekanbaru City	339,5 (Very Good)
Bandung Regency	338,0 (Very Good)
Wajo Regency	338,0 (Very Good)

Source: Proceed from <https://www.kasn.go.id>, 2 February 2024

Table 2 shows that Kota Tangerang has the highest score with 366.0, which falls into the 'Very Good' category. Meanwhile, Bandung Regency and Wajo Regency have scored in the 10th set of 10 districts/cities with a score of 338.0, but still in the 'Very Good' category. In conclusion, the government is faced with difficulties in implementing the merit system in improving the professionalism of ASN or State Civil Apparatus in Provincial and Regency/City areas, especially in areas outside Java. One of the contributing factors is the shortage of specialists in the field of staffing analysis and the low level of ASN competence.

Despite some improvements, structural limitations and political interference persist, contributing to a hierarchical management style with insufficient inter-departmental collaboration and feedback mechanisms. The observations indicate that communication between the administrative heads and operational staff remains predominantly top-down, limiting opportunities for transparent and inclusive decision-making.

Table 3. Merit Implementation Scores South Sumatera Province's Districts/Cities 2023

No.	District/City	Merit Score (s)	Category
1	Ogan Komering Ilir	297	Good
2	East Ogan Komering Ulu Regency	283.5	Good
3	Lubuk Linggau City	281	Good
4	South Sumatra Province	281	Good
5	Musi Rawas Regency	271	Good
6	Ogan Ilir Regency	270	Good
7	Palembang City	269.5	Good
8	South Ogan Komering Ulu Regency Selatan	265.5	Good
9	Ogan Komering Ulu Regency	191.5	Less
10	Empat Lawang Regency	182.5	Less
11	Penukal Abab Lematang Ilir Regency	175.5	Less
12	Banyuasin Regency	172.5	Bad
13	Lahat Regency	145	Bad
14	Muara Enim Regency	134.5	Bad
15	Musi Banyuasin Regency	119	Bad
16	Prabumulih City	94	Bad
17	Pagaralam City	42	Bad
18	North Musi Rawas Regency	-	-

Source: Proceed from <https://meritopedia.kasn.go.id>, accessed on 14 February 2024

Table 3 highlights that the District / City Government in South Sumatra Province still has not implemented ASN management optimally as evidenced by the fact that there are still many District / City Governments that have poor and insufficient category scores in the implementation of merit system-based ASN management, including Ogan Komering Ulu Regency which is currently in the 9th device out of 18 districts/cities in South Sumatra with a merit system score in 2023 of 191.5 in the insufficient category, so it can be said that the OKU District Government is still not optimal in implementing merit system-based ASN management.

Based on research findings, one of the primary obstacles is inadequate funding for training and development, which hinders the enhancement of staff qualifications and competencies. The local budget deficit, as highlighted in the 2024 BKPSDM plan, limits resources allocated to training and other initiatives vital for meritocratic practices. Due to budget cuts, many planned programs are either scaled back or postponed, leaving gaps in staff competencies and capacity. Limited funds also impact the recruitment process, resulting in a mismatch between available skills and job requirements. The deficit constrains efforts to align staffing needs with departmental demands, which further complicates the effective application of merit-based principles across departments.

Political interference remains a significant challenge. During interviews with Head of Organisation Section, OKU, Head of Procurement, Performance Appraisal, Dismissal and Information BKOSDM Kab.OKU, HR Analyst of Young Apparatus BKPSDM OKU, Head of Promotion and Mutation of BKPSDM Kab.OKU, Head of Apparatus Development BKPSDM Kab.OKU, OPD staffing department it was noted that political pressure often influences recruitment and promotion decisions, undermining the objective criteria that merit-based systems seek to uphold. Local leaders occasionally prioritize individuals aligned with their political interests, which detracts from the goal of impartial, competency-based employee management. This influence contributes to a culture of favouritism that not only affects staff morale but also diminishes public trust in the governance process. In response, KASN has recommended establishing stronger mechanisms to separate political and administrative functions, but the implementation of such measures remains challenging in practice.

Another pressing issue is the limited competency of current staff, partly due to the budget constraints that restrict training. With only 46.15% of staff receiving advanced training, there is a substantial gap in the skills needed to fully adopt and maintain meritocratic standards in public service delivery. This lack of targeted development results in a workforce that is often unprepared to meet the technical and professional demands associated with merit-based management. The current performance evaluation system lacks the transparency and objectivity required for a true meritocracy. Existing evaluations often do not reflect actual employee contributions and are not uniformly applied across departments. The absence of an integrated performance management system means that evaluations are often based on subjective judgments rather than measurable achievements. As a result, employees do not receive accurate feedback or performance-based incentives, which weakens the meritocratic framework and reduces motivation among staff.

Based on the identified challenges, several strategic interventions are proposed to reinforce the application of merit-based management in Ogan Komering Ulu. Addressing budgetary constraints is critical for improving staff competency and aligning recruitment with merit-based standards. Allocating additional funds specifically for training programs will enable employees to develop the competencies necessary for more specialized roles. Strategic budget management can ensure that crucial programs are prioritized, even amidst fiscal limitations. Efforts to secure alternative funding, such as government grants or private-sector partnerships, could also alleviate some of the financial pressures and sustain the merit-based system.

To mitigate political influence, it is essential to formalize clear guidelines for recruitment and promotion that emphasize competence and qualifications over political affiliation. Establishing a standardized, transparent process with predefined criteria for recruitment and promotion can help reduce opportunities for favouritism. Additionally, implementing mechanisms such as third-party audits and public accountability measures can increase transparency and safeguard the merit-based system against undue political pressures. Implementing an integrated, objective-based performance evaluation system is crucial to fostering a culture of meritocracy. Such a system should use measurable criteria linked to employees' responsibilities and contributions. Regular evaluations that provide constructive feedback and clear pathways for career progression can help motivate staff and align individual goals with organizational

objectives.

Effective implementation of merit-based management requires improved coordination between administrative units. Encouraging regular inter-departmental meetings and joint projects can help build a collaborative environment and break down silos. Clear guidelines delineating the roles of different administrative bodies, such as the Organization and HR Development units, will also reduce the potential for conflicts over responsibilities and promote a unified approach to ASN management. To foster greater awareness of the benefits of merit-based governance, a political education program targeting stakeholders, including government officials and community leaders, could be implemented. By promoting the advantages of a meritocratic system, such as improved public service delivery and fairer career progression, these programs can help reduce political interference in ASN management. In addition, KASN could play a proactive role in educating officials on the importance of maintaining neutrality in personnel decisions.

The result of this study underscore the significant challenges faced by Ogan Komering Ulu Regency in implementing a merit-based public sector management system. Two primary obstacles identified are political influence and resource limitations, both of which directly hinder the successful adoption and operation of meritocratic practices. These challenges not only undermine the transparency and fairness of recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation processes but also affect overall public sector efficiency and effectiveness.

One of the most pervasive challenges in the region is the influence of local politics on public sector management. Political interference often skews decision-making, particularly in recruitment and promotions, where appointments may be based on loyalty or political affiliation rather than merit. This situation not only fosters corruption but also demotivates civil servants, as promotions and rewards are seen as products of favoritism rather than competence. As a result, the integrity of the merit-based system is compromised, and the potential for improving public administration through competency-based governance is diminished. Political influence further exacerbates challenges related to accountability, as decisions are frequently made to align with political interests rather than the long-term goals of professional public service.

Resource scarcity is another critical barrier to the effective implementation of merit-

based systems. Ogan Komering Ulu, like many other regions, faces budgetary constraints that limit the ability to invest in the infrastructure needed for a robust meritocratic framework. These limitations affect the recruitment process, training opportunities, and the implementation of performance monitoring systems, all of which are essential for ensuring that merit-based practices are consistently applied. The lack of resources also impedes the capacity to provide ongoing professional development and capacity-building programs for civil servants, which are necessary to maintain a skilled and motivated workforce.

To address these challenges, this study proposes several strategic interventions aimed at enhancing the transparency and accountability of public sector management in Ogan Komering Ulu. The adoption of digital solutions, such as e-performance systems and e-monitoring platforms, is one of the most effective ways to mitigate the effects of political influence and resource limitations. These technologies enable real-time tracking of recruitment, promotions, and performance evaluations, ensuring that all processes are fully documented and auditable. The use of digital systems can also provide data-driven insights that help identify and mitigate patterns of favoritism or bias, reinforcing the fairness and integrity of the merit-based system. The implementation of e-monitoring platforms has proven successful in other countries, such as South Korea, where an e-government system was introduced to monitor civil servant performance. This system has led to notable improvements in accountability and public trust, as it ensures that performance data is objectively evaluated and readily available for scrutiny. Similarly, the Philippines implemented an HR information system that standardized evaluations across government departments, reducing biases and streamlining the promotion process. These examples illustrate the potential of digital technologies to promote transparency and reduce political interference by making processes more objective and traceable

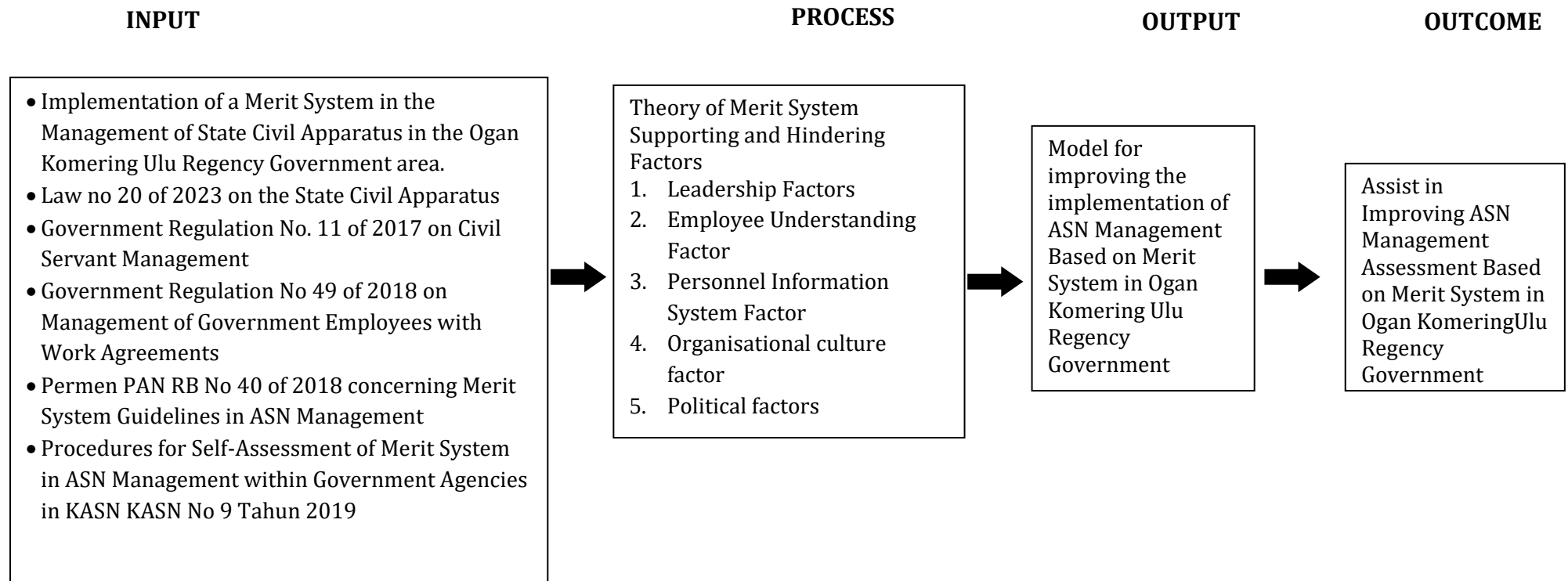


Figure 1. Thinking Framework for ASN Policy and Management Implementation

Model Based on Merit System in Ogan Komering Ulu Regency

Source: Proceed by Authors

The result suggest the importance of building political support and fostering inter-departmental collaboration. Effective merit-based systems require buy-in from key political leaders and local officials, as well as strong coordination among various government departments. By building a coalition of support and promoting a shared understanding of the value of merit-based governance, Ogan Komering Ulu can mitigate the effects of political interference and create a more stable environment for policy implementation. This approach is consistent with the principles of participative governance, which emphasize the active involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes.

Finally, this study emphasizes the need for a cultural shift toward greater accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement within the local government. The introduction of clear accountability mechanisms and regular monitoring will help ensure that merit-based practices are sustained over time. These practices should be embedded into the organizational culture, fostering a commitment to impartiality and professional development among civil servants.

Contribution to Literature

In the realm of public sector management literature, this study enriches the discussion on implementing meritocracy in resource-constrained and politically complex environments. By focusing specifically on Ogan Komering Ulu, the research highlights the importance of context-sensitive governance reforms that are often underrepresented in studies primarily centred on national or urban settings. This research advances the understanding that successful merit-based systems require tailored strategies that acknowledge local administrative dynamics and challenges. The model proposed in this study offers a practical framework that synthesizes theoretical concepts of meritocracy with real-world constraints, such as financial limitations and the need for political neutrality.

Contribution to Public Sector Management Practice

For practitioners, the intervention model serves as a practical guide for building a merit-based governance framework under challenging conditions. Each component of the model—resource reallocation, standardized recruitment, digital monitoring, and transparent performance evaluation—offers a replicable approach that local

governments can adjust based on their specific needs and constraints. Resource Reallocation and Alternative Funding: By recommending targeted budget allocations and alternative funding sources (such as government grants and educational partnerships), the model addresses a fundamental obstacle to meritocracy: insufficient training and development.

Standardized Recruitment and Promotion Processes: By establishing clear, transparent guidelines and independent oversight, the model demonstrates an effective means of reducing political bias in recruitment and promotion. This aspect of the model is particularly relevant for regions where political interference in civil servant management is prevalent. It serves as a blueprint for ensuring that recruitment is merit-based, which is essential for building a public administration that values qualifications and integrity. Digital Monitoring Systems for Transparency: The recommendation to use digital solutions for real-time monitoring of recruitment, promotions, and performance evaluations is an innovative component of this model that addresses the need for transparency in public sector management. Digital monitoring systems can serve as a deterrent to favoritism and bias, while also creating auditable records that reinforce accountability.

Practical Implications for Other Regions

By articulating these strategies in a structured, practical model, this study provides a reference framework for other local governments in Indonesia and similar contexts globally. Regions facing comparable challenges—such as political interference, limited budgets, and fragmented departmental structures—can draw on these insights to guide their merit-based reforms. The model's adaptability allows for adjustments in response to varying political and resource landscapes, making it an accessible tool for regions with distinct governance and fiscal environments.

In conclusion, this study contributes a comprehensive, adaptable model that integrates resource allocation, transparency, and competency-based assessments into a cohesive strategy for advancing meritocratic governance. This framework holds relevance for both scholars and public administration practitioners, offering theoretical insights and practical recommendations that can inform future public sector reforms in local and regional governance contexts. By building on these findings, future research could explore the model's effectiveness in diverse settings, potentially expanding its

applicability and refining its strategies to address emerging challenges in public sector meritocracy.

The findings of this study reveal that while the current merit-based system in Ogan Komering Ulu has established foundational structures, several challenges hinder its full potential. Limited resources, political interference, competency gaps, and insufficient evaluation systems continue to impact the effectiveness of merit-based governance. The proposed interventions—ranging from budget adjustments to digital monitoring—are aimed at addressing these barriers comprehensively.

These recommendations offer a roadmap for enhancing the merit-based management of ASN, ultimately contributing to a more transparent, competent, and accountable public sector. As Ogan Komering Ulu progresses with these reforms, this model could serve as a reference for other regions facing similar challenges, supporting Indonesia's broader objectives of public sector reform and governance innovation.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to assess the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing a merit-based management system within the civil service of Ogan Komering Ulu Regency. The findings highlight several critical barriers to the successful application of meritocratic practices, particularly resource constraints, political interference, and administrative inefficiencies. These challenges undermine the effectiveness and credibility of the merit system, but they also present important opportunities for reform and improvement. By addressing these obstacles in a comprehensive manner, local governments can move toward a more transparent, accountable, and efficient public sector that aligns with the principles of meritocracy.

The research underscores the need for sufficient resource allocation to sustain merit-based practices. Without adequate financial support, efforts to enhance employee competencies, establish objective recruitment processes, and implement fair performance evaluations are severely hindered. As highlighted in the study, resource limitations perpetuate underperformance, which in turn affects the quality of service delivery and the integrity of recruitment and promotion practices. For policymakers, these findings emphasize the critical need to prioritize funding for training programs, capacity-building initiatives, and the development of digital systems to support merit-based governance. Sustainable funding mechanisms—such as government grants,

public-private partnerships, or collaboration with educational institutions—are essential to overcoming these constraints and ensuring long-term success.

Political Interference remains a significant barrier to implementing a merit-based public service system in Ogan Komering Ulu. Despite national regulations that advocate for neutrality and fairness, local political dynamics often influence personnel decisions, leading to favoritism and subjectivity in recruitment and promotions. To mitigate political interference, the study recommends establishing stronger oversight mechanisms, such as independent hiring panels or third-party audits, to ensure that decisions are based on merit rather than political considerations. By embedding checks and balances into the recruitment and promotion processes, local governments can help restore public trust in the fairness of the merit-based system and prevent the erosion of its credibility.

The study also highlights the competency gaps among civil servants in Ogan Komering Ulu, signaling the need for targeted and ongoing professional development. To achieve a sustainable merit-based system, local governments must prioritize competency-building programs that align employee skills with the demands of meritocratic practices. By investing in the continuous development of civil servants, local administrations can better meet the evolving needs of public sector management and improve service delivery.

A further critical finding of the research is the lack of consistent and objective performance evaluations within the region. Current evaluation practices often lack transparency and objectivity, allowing for subjective assessments that undermine the fairness of the merit-based system. The study advocates for the development of an integrated performance evaluation system, based on clear, measurable criteria that ensure transparency and accountability in employee assessments. By incorporating regular feedback and aligning performance metrics with organizational goals, local governments can foster a culture of merit and motivate civil servants to contribute to improved governance outcomes.

Additionally, the study identifies the problem of departmental silos, which hinder coordination and the effective implementation of merit-based policies. To address this, the study recommends fostering inter-departmental collaboration and enhancing coordination across different branches of local government. This can be achieved

through regular meetings, collaborative projects, and the clear definition of roles and responsibilities. By encouraging knowledge-sharing and ensuring the alignment of merit-based practices across departments, Ogan Komering Ulu can optimize its resource use and implement policies more cohesively.

Fostering a culture of accountability and transparency emerges as a fundamental requirement for the long-term success of merit-based governance. The study suggests that leadership should actively model transparent practices, recognize high-performing employees, and implement reward mechanisms that incentivize integrity and accountability. This cultural shift is critical in overcoming the challenges of political interference and resource limitations. For public administration, these insights stress the importance of cultural change as a driver of sustainable governance reforms, highlighting the need for leadership commitment and stakeholder engagement in embedding merit-based values within daily practices.

In light of these findings, the study offers several actionable recommendations to strengthen merit-based governance in Ogan Komering Ulu. *The first* is to increase investment in training and development. Local governments should prioritize funding for training programs that enhance the competencies of civil servants, ensuring that they have the skills necessary to perform effectively in a meritocratic system. *The second* is to introduce robust oversight mechanisms. Establish independent recruitment and promotion panels, conduct third-party audits, and ensure regular monitoring of personnel decisions to prevent political interference and favouritism. *The third* is to develop a performance evaluation system. Implement a standardized and transparent system for performance evaluation based on objective, measurable criteria. This system should include regular feedback and performance tracking to ensure continuous improvement and accountability. *The fourth* is to encourage inter-departmental coordination. Facilitate regular collaboration among departments to streamline policy implementation, optimize resource use, and ensure the consistent application of merit-based practices across the local government. *The Fifth* is to leverage digital technologies. Utilize e-performance and e-monitoring platforms to track recruitment, promotions, and performance evaluations in real-time. These digital tools can enhance transparency, reduce bias, and provide reliable data to support merit-based decision-making. *The last* is to foster a culture of merit. Leadership must model transparency, accountability, and fairness by recognizing and rewarding high-performing employees.

Public sector leaders should prioritize ethical governance and promote a culture that values competence and integrity.

In conclusion, this study offers a comprehensive analysis of the challenges to merit-based governance in Ogan Komering Ulu, providing clear and actionable recommendations for overcoming these barriers. The findings underscore that the successful implementation of a merit-based system requires a multifaceted approach—one that integrates policy alignment, resource investment, institutional reforms, and cultural change. By addressing the key obstacles identified in this study, Ogan Komering Ulu can move toward a more efficient, transparent, and accountable public administration that reflects the principles of meritocracy. These insights are not only relevant for the local context but can also inform public sector reforms in other regions facing similar challenges, contributing to the broader goal of advancing fair and effective governance in Indonesia and beyond.

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