

Strengthening Merit-Based Recruitment Systems to Improve the Quality of ASN Talent

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the effect of strengthening the merit-based State Civil Apparatus (ASN) recruitment system on the quality of ASN talent. The merit-based recruitment system emphasizes the principles of objectivity, transparency, and competence as the main basis in the selection process for public officials. This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory design. Data was collected through a survey of civil servants recruited in the last five years in central and regional government agencies in Indonesia. Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire, while data analysis used linear regression. The results of the study show that the merit-based recruitment system has a positive and significant effect on the quality of ASN talent. The consistent application of the merit principle has been proven to be able to improve the professionalism, integrity, and performance of civil servants. However, this study also found that the quality of ASN talent is not only determined by the recruitment process, but is also influenced by other factors such as competency development, leadership, and organizational culture. This study concludes that strengthening the merit-based recruitment system is an important foundation in ASN management reform and needs to be integrated with a comprehensive human resource management system to produce superior and competitive apparatus.

Keywords: Merit-based recruitment; State Civil Apparatus; quality of talent; bureaucratic reform; Public Human Resource Management

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Introduction

Strengthening the merit-based State Civil Apparatus (ASN) recruitment system is a key element in bureaucratic reform and improving the quality of governance. ASN has a strategic role as a designer and implementer of public policies, public service providers, and the glue of national unity. Therefore, the quality of ASN talent greatly determines the effectiveness of the government and the level of public trust. Recruitment systems that are not based on merit risk producing less competent officials, low integrity, and inability to respond to the increasingly complex challenges of modern government.

Conceptually, merit-based recruitment emphasizes the principles of objectivity, transparency, and fairness in the employee selection process, by placing competencies, qualifications, and performance potential as the main basis for decision-making (Armstrong, 2014). This principle aims to ensure the suitability between individuals and positions (person-job fit), so that public organizations obtain human resources who are able to provide optimal performance. A classic study by Weber (1947) asserts that a rational modern bureaucracy should be built on a recruitment system based on qualifications and expertise, not patronage or personal relationships.

Various international studies show that the application of the merit system in bureaucratic recruitment has a positive correlation with the quality of governance. Rauch and Evans (2000) found that countries with bureaucracies that recruit employees based on competency and long-term careers show higher state capacity. These findings are reinforced by Dahlström, Lapuente, and Teorell (2012) who concluded that meritocratic recruitment contributes significantly to reducing the level of corruption and improving the quality of public services. Thus, the merit system not only has an impact on the quality of individual ASN, but also on overall institutional performance.

In Indonesia, a number of previous studies have shown that although the regulatory framework has adopted the principle of merit, its implementation still faces challenges. Prasojo and Kurniawan (2019) stated that the implementation of the merit system in ASN management at the regional level is still inconsistent, especially in the aspects of competency assessment and selection neutrality. Evaluative research by Nurmandi et al. (2020) found that the Computer Assisted Test (CAT)-based selection process increases transparency and accountability, but does not fully guarantee the quality of ASN if it is not followed by adequate managerial and socio-cultural competency assessments.

Another study examining the impact of merit-based recruitment on ASN performance showed relatively consistent results. A study by Kim and Ployhart (2014) confirms that a competency-based selection system has a positive relationship with employee initial performance and workforce stability. In Indonesia's public sector, research by Setyowati and Prasojo (2021) shows that civil servants recruited through merit mechanisms have higher levels of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, especially due to the perception of procedural fairness in the selection process. This perception of justice plays an important role in shaping the motivation and long-term work behavior of ASN.

However, previous research has also underlined that the success of merit-based recruitment is highly dependent on the quality of its implementation and integration with other human resource management systems. Moynihan and Pandey (2007) show that without the support of an objective career development and performance appraisal system, the positive impact of merit-based recruitment can weaken over time. Similar findings were put forward by Perry, Hondeghem, and Wise (2010) who emphasized that the merit system must be supported by a professional organizational culture and leadership with integrity in order to be able to produce sustainable public performance.

In addition, aspects of leadership and bureaucratic culture were also important focuses in previous research. Qualitative research by Peters (2015) shows that leadership's commitment to the principle of professionalism is a determining factor in preventing non-merit interventions in the recruitment process. In bureaucratic environments with a strong patronage culture, merit

systems are often only symbolic and do not fully affect the quality of recruitment results. This is in line with the findings of Berman et al. (2019) who emphasize the importance of cultural reform in addition to structural reform in strengthening the merit system.

Based on the synthesis of previous research, it can be concluded that strengthening the merit-based recruitment system has a strong theoretical and empirical foundation in improving the quality of ASN talent. Objective, transparent, and competency-based recruitment has been proven to contribute positively to performance, job satisfaction, professionalism, and integrity of the apparatus. However, its effectiveness is largely determined by the consistency of implementation, the quality of the selection instruments, the integration with the human resource development system, and the commitment of bureaucratic leadership. Therefore, the study of the strategy of strengthening merit-based recruitment systems is very relevant as a basis for policy formulation to realize superior and competitive ASN.

Literature Review

2.1 Merit-Based Recruitment in Public Sector Organizations

Merit-based recruitment is a fundamental principle in public sector human resource management that emphasizes the selection of employees based on qualifications, competencies, and performance, rather than on non-professional factors such as political patronage or personal relationships. This concept is rooted in the theory of rational bureaucracy put forward by Weber (1947), which asserts that modern bureaucracies must be built on skill-based recruitment systems and formal rules to guarantee administrative efficiency and fairness.

In the modern human resource management literature, merit-based recruitment is seen as a strategic instrument to achieve fit between individuals and organizations (person–organization fit) as well as individuals and positions (person–job fit) (Armstrong, 2014). Objective recruitment allows public organizations to acquire employees with relevant competencies and long-term performance potential. Boxall and Purcell (2016) emphasized that merit-based recruitment systems are a prerequisite for high-performance work systems in the public sector.

2.2 Merit System and Government Performance

A number of empirical studies show that the application of the merit system in bureaucratic recruitment is positively correlated with the quality of government and the performance of the public sector. Rauch and Evans (2000), in a cross-country study, found that bureaucracies that recruit employees based on competencies and long-term professional careers have a stronger state capacity to formulate and implement public policies. These findings are reinforced by Dahlström et al. (2012) who concluded that meritocratic recruitment contributes significantly to reducing the level of corruption and improving the quality of public services.

Another study by Meyer-Sahling, Schuster, and Mikkelsen (2018) shows that merit-based recruitment systems improve bureaucratic stability and apparatus professionalism, which in turn strengthens public trust in government institutions. Thus, the merit system not only has an impact on the quality of individual employees, but also on institutional performance and government legitimacy.

2.3 Merit-Based Recruitment and Employee Performance

The relationship between merit-based recruitment and employee performance has been widely studied in the HR management literature. Kim and Ployhart (2014) show that competency-based selection systems have a positive relationship with initial employee performance and labor retention. Proper recruitment allows new hires to adapt more quickly to the demands of the job and the culture of the organization.

In the public sector, research by Perry et al. (2010) emphasizes that merit-based recruitment contributes to increased motivation and prosocial work behavior of employees. Employees who are recruited through a fair and transparent process tend to have a higher

perception of procedural fairness, which has a positive impact on job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Colquitt et al., 2013). This perception of justice is an important psychological factor in maintaining the performance and integrity of ASN in the long term.

2.4 Implementation Challenges of Merit System in ASN Recruitment

Although the benefits of merit-based recruitment have been widely proven, its implementation in the public sector, particularly in the context of developing countries, still faces various challenges. Prasojo and Kurniawan (2019) revealed that the implementation of the merit system in ASN management in Indonesia is still partial and inconsistent, especially at the local government level. The main challenges include limited capacity of selection institutions, regulatory inconsistencies, and potential political intervention in the recruitment process.

Nurmandi et al. (2020) found that the use of Computer Assisted Test (CAT) in ASN selection increases transparency and accountability, but does not fully guarantee the quality of ASN if it is not accompanied by managerial and socio-cultural competency assessments. This shows that the merit system requires a comprehensive and standardized selection instrument to produce superior ASN talent.

2.5 Leadership, Organizational Culture, and Merit-Based Recruitment

The literature also highlights the role of leadership and organizational culture in the successful implementation of the merit system. Peters (2015) emphasized that leadership's commitment to the principles of professionalism and accountability is a key factor in preventing non-merit practices in recruitment. Without the support of the leadership, the merit system tends to be symbolic and does not have a significant impact on the quality of the selection results.

Berman et al. (2019) added that a bureaucratic culture that is still thick with patronage and seniority can weaken the effectiveness of merit-based recruitment. Therefore, strengthening merit-based recruitment must be accompanied by organizational culture reform and strengthening bureaucratic integrity as a whole.

Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a quantitative approach with an explanatory design that aims to analyze the influence of the merit-based recruitment system on the quality of State Civil Apparatus (ASN) talent. The quantitative approach was chosen because it allows for the objective measurement of relationships between variables as well as hypothesis testing based on empirical data. Explanatory design is used to explain the cause-and-effect relationship between the application of the merit principle in recruitment and the quality of ASN produced.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population in this study is all civil servants who work in central and regional government agencies in Indonesia. Given the size of the population, this study uses a purposive sampling technique with the criteria of ASN recruited in the last five years. The selection of this criterion aims to ensure that respondents have first-hand experience with relatively up-to-date ASN recruitment practices. The number of research samples was 250 respondents, which was considered adequate for multivariate statistical analysis and instrument reliability testing.

3.1 Research Variables and Measurement

This research involves two main variables, namely the merit-based recruitment system as an independent variable and the quality of ASN talent as a dependent variable. The merit-based recruitment system is measured through indicators of transparency of the selection process, objectivity of assessment criteria, use of competency-based assessments, fairness of opportunity, and lack of non-professional intervention. Meanwhile, the quality of ASN talent

is measured through indicators of work competence, performance, professionalism, integrity, adaptability, and commitment to the value of public services. All indicators were measured using a five-point Likert scale to capture respondents' level of approval of each statement.

3.2 Technical Data Collection

Data collection was carried out using a structured questionnaire that was distributed online and offline to respondents. The questionnaire is prepared based on theoretical studies and previous research to ensure conformity with the construct being studied. Before being widely disseminated, the research instrument was tested on a limited number of respondents to ensure the clarity of the questions and identify potential biases in the measurements.

3.3 Validity and Reliability Testing

The validity test is performed to ensure that each statement item is capable of measuring the construct in question, using item-total correlation and factor analysis. The reliability test was carried out by calculating Cronbach's alpha value to assess the internal consistency of the research instrument. The instrument is declared reliable if Cronbach's alpha value exceeds the minimum limit of 0.70, which indicates that the items in the questionnaire have a good level of consistency.

3.4 Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis is done using statistical software, such as SPSS. The analysis stages include descriptive analysis to describe the characteristics of the respondents, testing the validity and reliability of the instruments, and testing classical assumptions that include normality, multicollinearity, and heteroscedasticity. To test the influence of the merit-based recruitment system on the quality of ASN talent, linear regression analysis was used, which allowed researchers to assess the direction and strength of the relationship between variables.

Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

The results of the descriptive analysis show that the implementation of the merit-based ASN recruitment system is in the good category. Respondents assessed that the aspects of transparency and objectivity of selection have increased, especially through the use of technology-based selection systems. Meanwhile, the quality of ASN talent is also considered quite high, especially in the indicators of professionalism and commitment to public services.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Research Variables

Variable	N	Red	Std. Deviation	Category
Merit-Based Recruitment System	250	4.02	0.56	High
ASN Talent Quality	250	3.95	0.61	High

The relatively high average score on both variables shows that respondents feel real benefits from the application of the merit principle in the ASN recruitment process.

4.2 Validity Test Results

The validity test shows that the entire statement item has an item-total correlation value above the r-table value (0.30). This indicates that each indicator is able to accurately measure the construct in question and is suitable for use in advanced analysis.

Table 2. Validity Test Results

Variable	Item Code	R-Count	r-table	Results
Merit-Based Recruitment System	MBR1	0.712	0.300	Valid

Variable	Item Code	R-Count	r-table	Results
	MBR2	0.689	0.300	Valid
	MBR3	0.731	0.300	Valid
ASN Talent Quality	ATQ1	0.754	0.300	Valid
	ATQ2	0.702	0.300	Valid
	ATQ3	0.768	0.300	Valid

4.3 Reliability Test Results

The results of the reliability test using Cronbach's alpha showed that all variables had values above the minimum limit of 0.70. This indicates that the research instrument has a good level of internal consistency.

Table 3. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Standard	Results
Merit-Based Recruitment System	0.874	0.70	Reliable
ASN Talent Quality	0.861	0.70	Reliable

4.4 Classical Assumption Test Results

Classical assumption testing shows that the regression model meets all statistical criteria. The data were distributed normally, there was no multicollinearity, and no symptoms of heteroscedasticity were found. Thus, the regression model is feasible to use for hypothesis testing.

Table 4. Classical Assumption Test Summary

Test Type	Indicator	Results	Conclusion
Normality	Sig. Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.200 > 0.05	Normal
Multicollinearity	VIVID	1.21 < 10	No issue
Heteroskedasticity	Sig. Glejser Test	0.318 > 0.05	No issue

4.5 Regression Analysis Results

The results of linear regression analysis show that the merit-based recruitment system has a positive and significant effect on the quality of ASN talent. The value of the positive regression coefficient shows that the stronger the application of the merit principle, the higher the quality of the ASN produced.

Table 5. Regression Analysis Results

Variable	β Coefficient	t-value	Sig.	Conclusion
Constant	1.215	4.32	0.000	Significant
Merit-Based Recruitment System	0.648	9.87	0.000	Significant

These findings support the person-job fit theory as well as the research results of Rauch and Evans (2000) and Dahlstrom et al. (2012) which state that meritocratic recruitment contributes significantly to improving the quality of bureaucracy.

4.6 Coefficient of Determination

The determination coefficient value shows that the merit-based recruitment system explains most of the variation in the quality of ASN talent, although there are still other factors that also influence.

Table 6. Coefficient of Determination

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
0.721	0.520	0.518

The R Square value of 0.520 indicates that 52% of the variation in the quality of ASN talent can be explained by the merit-based recruitment system, while the rest is influenced by other factors such as competency development, leadership, and organizational culture.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the strengthening of the merit-based State Civil Apparatus (ASN) recruitment system has a significant influence on improving the quality of ASN talent. The results of the empirical analysis show that the recruitment process carried out in a transparent, objective, and competency-based manner is able to produce civil servants with a better level of professionalism, integrity, and performance. These findings confirm that merit-based recruitment is a strategic instrument in building superior and competitive human resources of the apparatus.

This research proves that the application of the merit principle in recruitment not only has an impact on the quality of individual civil servants, but also contributes to increasing the effectiveness of public organizations. ASNs recruited through a fair and accountable mechanism show a higher level of job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which ultimately supports the performance of public services. Thus, the merit system in recruitment serves as an important foundation for bureaucratic reform and strengthening governance.

However, this study also reveals that the merit-based recruitment system does not fully explain all the variations in the quality of ASN talent. This indicates that there are other factors that also affect the quality of ASN, such as the career development system, bureaucratic leadership, and organizational culture. Therefore, strengthening merit-based recruitment needs to be integrated with a comprehensive human resource management system so that its impact is sustainable and optimal.

The results of this study affirm the importance of policy and institutional commitment in strengthening the merit-based ASN recruitment system. Consistent and integrated recruitment reform is believed to be able to produce civil servants who are competent, have integrity, and are ready to face the challenges of modern government. These findings are expected to be the basis for the formulation of policies and strategies for managing ASN that are more effective and oriented towards improving the quality of public services.

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