

Meritocracy in Village Government: Implementation of Village Apparatus Recruitment in Tuban Regency

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ABSTRACT

The implementation of meritocracy in village government is a crucial issue in realizing professional, transparent, and accountable village governance. In Tuban Regency, the simultaneous recruitment of village officials was implemented as an effort to standardize the selection process and minimize nepotism, political intervention, and subjective considerations in filling village official positions. However, the implementation of meritocratic principles in the recruitment process still requires further study. This study aims to analyze the implementation of meritocracy in the simultaneous recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency and identify various obstacles encountered during the implementation process. This study used a qualitative approach with secondary data analysis methods. Data were obtained through a review of various documents, including laws and regulations, local government policies, recruitment implementation reports, legal decisions, media coverage, and relevant scientific literature. Data were analyzed using content analysis techniques through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, interpretation, and drawing conclusions. The results show that the simultaneous recruitment system has contributed to improved administrative standardization, transparency of the selection process, and more equal opportunities for participants. However, the implementation of meritocracy has not been optimal due to various obstacles, such as weak oversight mechanisms, indications of local political intervention, the use of conventional selection systems that are vulnerable to fraudulent practices, limited access to information, and low public trust in the neutrality of the selection process. This study concludes that the simultaneous recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency is a positive initial step in realizing meritocratic-based village governance. However, strengthening the oversight system, increasing transparency, utilizing information technology in the selection process, and strengthening institutional capacity are still needed for the principles of meritocracy to be implemented more effectively and sustainably.

Keywords: Meritocracy, Village Apparatus, Village Apparatus Recruitment, Village Government,

Introduction

Village governments are the smallest units of the government bureaucracy and hold a strategic position in the administration of government in Indonesia, as they serve as the frontline

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for public services and the implementation of development at the local level. Following the implementation of decentralization and the strengthening of village autonomy through Law No. 6 of 2014 on Villages, village governments are required to be capable of exercising professional, effective, transparent, and accountable governance. In this context, village officials play a crucial role as the administrative, public service, development, and community empowerment agents of the village (Siwi Nugraha, 2019; Iswanto, 2021). Villages are at the forefront of achieving success in all matters and welfare development programs, as the majority of poverty is concentrated in rural areas.

To ensure the capacity of both village government bodies and the community, the quality of human resources is a key indicator in determining a village's progress (Widayanti, 2020). In addition, there are at least four key, interrelated issues in rural development: poverty, health, infrastructure, and human capital (Mashudi et al., 2020). These various issues will be difficult to address if village officials lack the necessary competence and capacity to carry out their governmental and public service functions. Therefore, having a professional and competent village administration is essential to supporting the success of village development.

The competence of village officials is one of the complex issues faced in village governance. Previous studies indicate that several problems remain prevalent, such as low professionalism and poor quality of human resources among village officials (Chornelia et al., 2023; Pristiani & Astuti, 2024; Sugianto, 2022), lack of administrative and technical capabilities (Maharani, 2020; Saifullah et al., 2021), a lack of professionalism in the workplace, as well as the continued presence of nepotism and political interference in the process of filling village administrative positions (Munir et al., 2025; Sahid & Herawati, 2023; Tigar, 2022). Therefore, enhancing the competencies of village officials is of paramount importance as the cornerstone for strengthening effective and sustainable village governance, intending to promote village development and alleviate poverty among the local population.

One region still facing these challenges is Tuban Regency, where strengthening the competencies of village officials is an urgent necessity to improve the quality of village governance while accelerating development that leads to a reduction in poverty rates. The competencies of village officials in Tuban Regency remain a major obstacle to improving the quality of the village government bureaucracy. The continued lack of officials who are technologically illiterate, as well as the presence of village officials who do not actually meet the job qualifications, makes this issue critical (Iswanto, 2022). A merit-based system is difficult to implement at the village level due to ongoing confusion regarding the filling of village official

positions, which in some cases is done through direct election by the village head and in others through appointment (Siwi Nugraha, 2019).

In order to ensure a competent civil service, these efforts can begin at the initial stage through an open, transparent, and merit-based recruitment process for village officials, aimed at ensuring the selection of individuals with adequate capacity, integrity, and professionalism. Theoretically, the merit system or meritocracy is a principle in human resource management that emphasizes that the appointment, placement, and development of civil servants are based on an individual's qualifications, competencies, performance, and integrity, rather than on personal connections, political affiliations, or nepotism. According to Michael Young in (Heryyanto & Muzakki, 2022), Meritocracy is understood as a system that places individuals based on their abilities and achievements. Meanwhile, James Q. Wilson in (Hasim, 2025) emphasizes that the implementation of a merit-based system in the bureaucracy is essential for creating a professional and effective organization. Thus, through the implementation of a merit-based system, it is hoped that a village bureaucracy will emerge that is objective, accountable, and focused on providing quality public services, and that is capable of promoting the effectiveness of village development.

To ensure a competent civil service, this can be achieved at the initial stage through open recruitment of village officials. Previous research indicates that open recruitment of village officials can enhance the implementation of a merit-based system, encourage public participation in the selection process, and contribute to improving the competence of village officials, making them more professional and accountable (A. Rohman et al., 2024; N. Rohman et al., 2025). It is hoped that this open recruitment system will attract competent village officials who can work to their full potential to advance the village. The urgency of this test stems from the need to fill vacancies in the village administration, a key component in assisting the village head with policy formulation and coordination through the village secretariat, as well as in supporting the village head's duties.

Based on the track record of recruitment for village government officials in Tuban Regency, the process has been marred by numerous instances of fraud. For example, several examinees taking the village official exam in Sambongrejo Village, Semanding Subdistrict, requested that the exam be re-administered due to suspected fraud during the grading process, specifically the alteration of answers by certain committee members, as well as allegations of candidates securing spots by paying bribes to certain individuals (Sudarsono, 2017). In the same year, in the village of Lajukidul, Singgahan Subdistrict, during the administration of the selection exam for prospective village officials, the local village committee deliberately planned to commit fraud. A TPPD official colluded with one of the exam participants to award the highest score

(Suwandi, 2018). This indicates that various instances of fraud occur due to low moral standards, weak oversight, and law enforcement that is neither firm nor effective in deterring such behavior (Nurmaya & Febrina, 2021).

Given these various issues, local governments should reform their recruitment processes for village officials. Many regions have implemented the Computer-Assisted Test (CAT) system in the recruitment of village officials, a method often used in the selection of Civil Service Candidates (CASN). The CAT system represents a new paradigm in the employee recruitment process within the framework of the bureaucratic system. The creation of the CAT system is a strategy for transforming work methods and mechanisms based on the use of information technology to improve work quality. This employee recruitment system is considered the most objective, transparent, and accountable strategy for addressing the challenges and needs expected by the public, as has been implemented in Indonesia (Himam, 2016). With the implementation of this system in recruitment, the application of meritocracy in village administration becomes evident.

Some regions that have implemented the CAT system in the recruitment of village officials include Sidoarjo Regency, which has been doing so since 2016 (Siswati, 2017), East Barito since 2019 (Malo, 2019), Batang Regency since 2022 (Muslihun, 2022) and the Kudus Regency since 2023 (Gozali, 2023). This selection process has, in fact, proven to enhance effectiveness and efficiency while improving the transparency and objectivity of the selection results. Results are available immediately upon completion of the test, minimizing human error compared to conventional manual written tests, which are prone to marking errors and carry a high risk of various forms of cheating.

The selection of village officials in Tuban Regency will be conducted using a conventional written exam. A proposal to use a Computer-Assisted Testing (CAT) system, submitted by Surabaya State University to the Tuban Regency Government as a partner in developing exam questions, has not yet been implemented. In fact, the CAT system could enhance the credibility of the selection process, prevent cheating, and save time and money (Aliyadi et al., 2021).

Although previous studies have extensively examined the competence of village officials, the implementation of merit systems, and the challenges of village governance (Chornelia et al., 2023; Munir et al., 2025; N. Rohman et al., 2025), most have focused on evaluating the effectiveness of open recruitment or identifying factors affecting village officials' competencies. Limited attention has been given to examining how meritocracy is implemented within the recruitment process itself, particularly in regions that continue to rely on conventional written examinations rather than technology-based recruitment systems. Moreover, previous studies have

not sufficiently explored how recruitment practices are influenced by local governance dynamics, including political intervention, patronage, weak oversight, and the persistence of fraudulent practices. Consequently, empirical evidence regarding the implementation of meritocracy in village apparatus recruitment within the context of simultaneous recruitment at the regency level remains limited, particularly in Tuban Regency.

This study offers both empirical and contextual novelty. Empirically, it investigates the implementation of meritocracy in the simultaneous recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency, a case that has received limited scholarly attention despite its strategic importance for village governance reform. Contextually, the study examines how conventional recruitment mechanisms interact with meritocratic principles, particularly regarding competence, transparency, objectivity, accountability, equal access, and political neutrality. By identifying the institutional and governance challenges that hinder the implementation of a merit-based recruitment system, this study contributes to the development of village governance literature and provides policy recommendations for strengthening transparent and accountable recruitment practices at the village level.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study addresses an important research gap concerning the implementation of meritocracy in the simultaneous recruitment of village officials, particularly in regions that continue to employ conventional recruitment mechanisms. Unlike previous studies that primarily focused on the competence of village officials or the effectiveness of open recruitment, this research examines how meritocratic principles are implemented in practice and identifies the institutional factors that hinder their realization. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the implementation of meritocracy in the recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency by examining the recruitment planning process, the application of merit system principles, and the obstacles encountered during implementation. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the literature on meritocracy and village governance and practically to the formulation of more transparent, objective, and accountable village recruitment policies.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative research method using a case study approach. Qualitative research is a research process aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of social phenomena by constructing a comprehensive picture based on various sources of information, which is then presented in a descriptive form using words within a natural context (Walidin et al., 2020). This approach was chosen because it is suitable for analyzing the implementation of meritocracy in the simultaneous recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency and for identifying the various

factors that influence its implementation. This study uses secondary data as its primary research source. Data collection was conducted through a documentary review of various regulations governing village apparatus recruitment in Tuban Regency, official government documents, websites of relevant agencies, scientific journals, and credible media reports relevant to the research focus. Secondary data was chosen to obtain comprehensive information regarding policies, implementation mechanisms, and the dynamics emerging in the simultaneous village apparatus recruitment process. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive qualitative methods by examining and interpreting the collected data to describe the empirical conditions of merit-based system implementation in village apparatus recruitment in Tuban Regency. This study aims to describe the phenomenon systematically, factually, and objectively based on available data, thereby providing an overview of the implementation of meritocracy, the challenges faced, and its relevance to efforts to achieve professional and accountable village governance.

Results and Discussion

The findings and discussion in this study are presented to analyze the implementation of meritocracy in the simultaneous recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency. The discussion focuses on three main interrelated aspects of the village official recruitment process. First, the study discusses the Planning of Village Official Needs as the initial stage in determining the structure and staffing requirements of village officials based on the conditions and needs of village governance. Second, the study examines the Implementation of the Merit System in the Selection and Recruitment of Village Officials, which includes selection mechanisms, the application of competency principles, transparency, objectivity, and accountability in the recruitment process. Third, the study discusses Obstacles in the Implementation of the Merit System for Village Official Recruitment, whether arising from regulatory, institutional, local political culture, or technical factors in the selection process. These three subsections are used to provide a comprehensive overview of the implementation of the merit system in the recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency

1) Planning for Village Equipment Needs

Planning for village official positions is a crucial initial step in the recruitment process, as it involves determining the positions required by the village government. This planning is conducted to ensure that the filling of village official positions aligns with the organizational needs of the village government and supports the effective delivery of public services and village development (Sunarso et al., 2025; Zega et al., 2025). In the context of a merit-based system, workforce planning is a crucial component of achieving professional village governance, as the

recruitment of personnel must be based on the organization’s actual needs, not on specific interests (Anas & Shodikin, 2025).

The planning of village apparatus staffing needs is established by the Tuban Regency Government through a letter from the Tuban Regency Secretary No. 140/2890/414/105.5/2023. Village governments are authorized to propose staffing allocations in accordance with their needs and to fill vacant positions. Vacancies in the village apparatus occur when a village official has reached retirement age, has been dismissed, or has passed away (Wahidin et al., 2021). Each village begins planning for proposed village officials by forming a committee to fill village-level positions. Once the committee is formed, the appointment team will proceed with the process based on a decision issued by the village head.

There are 237 openings for village officials in Tuban Regency, spread across 165 villages or 19 of the 20 sub-districts in Tuban Regency

Table 1. Number of positions for the 2023 village apparatus selection across Tuban Regency

No.	Position	Number
1.	Village Secretary	23
2.	Head Administrative and General Affairs	32
3.	Head of Finance	12
4.	Head of Planning	21
5.	Head of Government Affairs Section	21
6.	Head of Social Welfare Section	34
7.	Head of Service Section	45
8.	Hamlet Head	49
Total Positions		237

Source: Tuban Regency Government (2023)

The data indicates that 237 village official positions were opened during the simultaneous recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency. The written exam is scheduled for August 9, 2023, as part of the selection process for prospective village officials. In planning the written exam, the village government has engaged a third party—specifically a university—to assist in the preparation of the exam questions. This provision aligns with Article 16 of Tuban Regent Regulation No. 11 of 2022 regarding the Second Amendment to Regent Regulation No. 30 of 2017 on the Implementing Regulations of Tuban Regency Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2016 on Village

Officials, which states that the village government may collaborate with third parties in the preparation of written exam questions. In practice, the Tuban Regency Government collaborates with Airlangga University as the party responsible for preparing exam questions for prospective village officials. This collaboration may proceed after obtaining the sub-district head's approval and is adjusted to each village's financial capacity, given that the costs of procuring exam materials are borne by the village government and budgeted through the Village Revenue and Expenditure Budget (APBDes).

The involvement of universities in the development of exam materials indicates that local governments are striving to enhance the objectivity, professionalism, and credibility of the recruitment process for village officials. The participation of third parties with academic expertise is expected to minimize the influence of local interests, fraudulent practices, and potential nepotism in the selection process (Ridwan et al., 2024). In addition, collaboration with universities also reflects the application of meritocratic principles, as the selection process is designed to assess participants' competencies in a more standardized and accountable manner. However, the allocation of costs for question development to each village through the Village Budget (APBDes) indicates a reliance on the village's financial capacity, which has the potential to create disparities in the quality of recruitment implementation across villages. This situation indicates that the implementation of a merit-based system in the recruitment of village officials still requires more equitable institutional support and funding so that the principles of fairness and professionalism can be optimally applied.

From the perspective of meritocracy, workforce planning is not merely an administrative exercise but also the foundation for ensuring that recruitment is based on organizational needs rather than personal or political interests. The identification of 237 vacant positions across 165 villages demonstrates that recruitment planning was conducted systematically according to actual staffing requirements. This reflects the merit principle of competence, as recruitment is intended to fill positions based on institutional needs rather than discretionary appointments. Furthermore, the involvement of Airlangga University in preparing examination materials represents an effort to strengthen objectivity and accountability by reducing direct intervention from village elites in determining examination content. Nevertheless, the dependence of question preparation costs on each village's financial capacity indicates that equal implementation of merit principles has not yet been fully achieved, as villages with limited financial resources may face constraints in ensuring recruitment quality comparable to that of wealthier villages.

2) Implementation of a Merit System in the Selection and Recruitment of Village Officials

The implementation of a merit-based system in the selection and recruitment of village officials is an effort to achieve professional, transparent, and accountable village governance through a process of filling positions based on the competencies, qualifications, and abilities of prospective village officials. The merit-based system emphasizes that every citizen has an equal opportunity to participate in the selection process without discrimination, political interference, or nepotism (Setyowati, 2016). In the context of village governance, the implementation of a merit-based system is crucial because the quality of village officials is a key determinant of the effectiveness of public services, the implementation of development initiatives, and the management of village administration.

The purpose of implementing a merit system is to provide equal opportunities, ensure open competition, and uphold fairness. To give the public equal opportunities to participate in the recruitment process, announcements are made through the media, the government's official website, and social media. The public can view and access recruitment announcements for village officials via the website <https://tubankab.go.id/>. Various media outlets have reported on this village official recruitment, including jawapos.com, bloktuban.com, tugujatim.id, beritajatim.com, and others. Additionally, social media is utilized in the information dissemination process through the Instagram account @lowkertuban and the Facebook page Info Tuban. Thus, the public has equal access.

In the recruitment process, there are criteria that applicants must meet. The qualifications and requirements for registering as a village official in Tuban Regency are based on Tuban Regent Regulation No. 11 of 2022 regarding the Second Amendment to Regent Regulation No. 30 of 2017 on the Implementing Regulations of Tuban Regency Regional Regulation No. 2 of 2016 on Village Officials, as follows: (1) a notarized statement of devotion to God the Almighty; (2) a notarized statement affirming adherence to and practice of Pancasila, the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, and the commitment to uphold and preserve the unity of the Unitary State of the Republic of Indonesia and the principle of “Bhinneka Tunggal Ika”; (3) certified copies of educational certificates from elementary school through the highest level of education attained; (4) certified copies of the Birth Certificate; (5) certified copies of the National Identity Card; (6) a Certificate of Good Health from a Community Health Center or authorized health official; (7) a Police Clearance Certificate from the Police; (8) a Certificate of Never Having Been Sentenced to Imprisonment for committing a criminal offense carrying a minimum sentence of five years or more from the District Court; (9) a statement confirming having served a prison sentence for committing a criminal offense carrying a minimum sentence of 5 (five) years; (10) a statement of

willingness to reside and settle/take up residence in the work area; and (11) a recent 4x6 cm color passport-sized photo.

The numerous administrative requirements that applicants must meet, coupled with the manual bureaucratic process of legalizing various required documents, place a significant burden on applicants. Every day at the Tuban Regency Population and Civil Registration Office from June 15, 2023, through July 9, 2023, there were an average of 700 applicants daily handling the administrative requirements for village apparatus registration (Huda, 2023). Candidates are burdened with too many administrative requirements that are inefficient and do not focus on substantive matters (Setyowati, 2016). Local governments need to reform this ineffective system. For example, legalization could be handled at the subdistrict level. Since subdistricts already maintain databases of local residents, including ID cards, birth certificates, and family cards, residents would not need to flock to a single location at the Population and Civil Registration Office.

These findings indicate that the recruitment process still emphasizes procedural compliance rather than competency assessment. From a meritocratic perspective, administrative requirements should function only as preliminary eligibility criteria, whereas the primary focus of recruitment should be on evaluating candidates' qualifications, competencies, and potential performance. Excessive administrative requirements may unintentionally reduce equal access for prospective applicants, particularly those from remote villages or economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Consequently, although the recruitment process is formally open to all citizens, substantive equality of opportunity has not yet been fully realized. This finding suggests that the implementation of meritocracy in village official recruitment remains procedurally oriented and has not yet fully reflected the principles of equal access and fairness that constitute the foundation of a merit-based system.

The Tuban Regency government plans to implement a Computer-Assisted Testing (CAT) system. This measure is intended to ensure that there is no buying and selling of village official positions in Tuban Regency during this year's recruitment process (Lindawati, 2023). However, on June 26, 2023, the planned system was revised. The selection process will be conducted in the conventional manner using a paper-based written test. Pursuant to Tuban Regent Regulation No. 11 of 2022, Article 16, the examination consists of a written test and a computer practical test. The examination material for village officials covers government knowledge, religious knowledge, general knowledge, Indonesian language, and computer knowledge (Youhanita et al., 2022). This means, of course, that the merit system has not yet been fully implemented, and there is a high likelihood that a spoils system will emerge. A spoils system refers to the appointment or selection

of employees based on personal preferences or the interests of a particular group (Rahardi et al., 2020).

The cancellation of the Computer-Assisted Testing (CAT) system represents a significant setback in the implementation of meritocracy. From the perspective of merit-based recruitment, technology-based selection systems are designed to strengthen objectivity, transparency, accountability, and equal treatment by minimizing direct human intervention in the assessment process. In contrast, the continued reliance on conventional paper-based examinations increases the risk of subjective scoring, manipulation of examination results, and political intervention, particularly in local governance settings where patronage networks remain influential. Therefore, the decision to cancel the CAT system indicates that the principles of meritocracy have not yet been fully institutionalized in the recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency. Although the simultaneous recruitment mechanism has improved administrative standardization, the absence of a technology-based assessment system limits its ability to ensure fair and competency-based selection.

The implications of these research findings indicate that the implementation of a merit-based system in the recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency has not yet been optimal, as it continues to face administrative and technical challenges that affect the effectiveness of the selection process. The large number of manual administrative requirements makes the registration process inefficient and burdensome for the public, potentially reducing accessibility and equal opportunities for prospective candidates. This situation indicates that the bureaucratic aspects of village official recruitment remain more focused on fulfilling administrative documentation than on assessing the substantive competencies of prospective village officials. Furthermore, the cancellation of the CAT system's implementation and the continued use of manually written tests suggest that the selection process has not yet fully ensured objectivity, transparency, and accountability. The use of a manual system creates opportunities for a "spoils system," fraudulent practices, intervention by certain interests, and weak control over the evaluation of selection results. Thus, these findings demonstrate that the implementation of a merit-based system in village official recruitment still requires administrative reform, the digitization of services, and the strengthening of technology-based selection systems to produce professional, competent village officials free from political patronage or nepotism.

3) Challenges in Implementing a Merit-Based Recruitment System for Village Officials

The implementation of a merit-based system in the recruitment of village officials is fundamentally aimed at creating an objective, transparent, and competency-based selection

process. However, in practice, there are still various obstacles that affect the effectiveness of the merit-based system. There are two main obstacles in the recruitment process for village officials: technical and administrative obstacles, and political and cultural obstacles (Andre Djorghy, 2019; Setyowati, 2016). Administrative and technical obstacles in the recruitment and selection process for village officials are primarily related to limited technological infrastructure support. The cancellation of the CAT system's implementation in the recruitment process for village officials in Tuban Regency was caused by inadequate information technology facilities and infrastructure, as well as minimal involvement of external parties in supporting the facilitation of computer-based selection. These conditions indicate that institutional readiness and infrastructure are critical factors in the implementation of technology-based merit systems. Therefore, the local government should establish partnerships with universities in Tuban Regency and collaborate with schools equipped with computer laboratories to support the provision of examination rooms and computer equipment for the implementation of CAT-based selection. This collaboration model has been implemented by the Sidoarjo Regency Government through cooperation with the State Civil Service Agency regarding the use of the CAT system and with Surabaya State University regarding the preparation of test questions and the technical implementation of the selection process (Rodiyah, 2024).

Second are political and cultural barriers. Conspiracies that arise naturally are not easy to trace because they involve many parties. Practices of fraud, collusion, and nepotism were still found in previous recruitment processes because they relied on manual systems. The buying and selling of positions occurred in Tuban Regency, specifically in Lajukidul Village, Singgahan Subdistrict. This practice involved awarding the highest scores on written exams, thereby ensuring that one of the test takers passed as a candidate for village official (Suwandi, 2018). At the same time, during the selection process for village officials in Sambongrejo Village, Semanding Subdistrict, instances of fraud were discovered involving the alteration of answers by certain committee members. Additionally, there are allegations that some participants secured their positions by paying bribes to certain individuals (Rohman, 2017).

In addition, another issue has arisen: some villages have refused to participate in the simultaneous selection of village officials coordinated by the Regency Government. The village of Sokosari has chosen to conduct the selection of village official candidates independently at the village level. Although legally the village government has the authority to conduct the screening and selection of village official candidates independently, this policy has the potential to cause social conflict and differing perceptions within the community regarding the objectivity and transparency of the selection process. This situation has led most village governments to opt for

the simultaneous selection mechanism coordinated by the regency government in order to minimize potential conflict and maintain the legitimacy of the selection results in the community (Muntaha, 2023).

Legislation regarding the recruitment mechanism for village officials needs to be evaluated immediately, given the potential for conflict and uncertainty in its implementation. On the other hand, Law No. 5 of 2014 on the Civil Service stipulates that a merit-based system is applied in the selection process for civil servants, meaning that village officials are not covered by these regulations. Furthermore, Tuban Regency Regulation No. 11 of 2016 on Village Governance stipulates that the process of identifying and screening candidates for village officials is carried out by a village committee appointed by the village head. This provision results in the regency government having limited legal authority to fully coordinate the recruitment process for village officials across all villages. This situation indicates regulatory disharmony that has the potential to hinder the implementation of a merit-based system in the recruitment of village officials. Policy evaluation and harmonization are needed so that the regency government has a stronger legal basis for coordinating the recruitment process of village officials in an integrated manner to achieve a more objective, transparent, and accountable selection process and to minimize the potential for conflict within the community.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that the barriers to implementing a merit-based recruitment system extend beyond technical and administrative issues to encompass broader institutional and governance challenges. Weak oversight mechanisms have reduced the government's capacity to ensure accountability and prevent fraudulent practices throughout the recruitment process. At the same time, limited digital infrastructure has constrained the adoption of technology-based recruitment systems capable of improving transparency and objectivity. Furthermore, regulatory disharmony and the persistence of local patronage networks have created an institutional environment in which meritocratic principles remain difficult to implement consistently. These findings suggest that meritocracy in village official recruitment is influenced not only by recruitment procedures but also by the broader governance system that shapes local political and administrative practices.

The implications of these research findings indicate that the implementation of a merit-based system in the recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency still faces various structural, technical, and socio-political obstacles that affect the effectiveness of competency-based selection. Limitations in technological infrastructure and the cancellation of the CAT system implementation suggest that the local government's institutional readiness to support the modernization of the recruitment system remains suboptimal. These conditions result in the selection process continuing

to rely on manual systems, which have the potential to lead to fraudulent practices, manipulation of selection results, and a lack of transparency and accountability in the recruitment process. Furthermore, the continued presence of collusion, nepotism, the buying and selling of positions, and interference by certain individuals indicates that the culture of political patronage at the local level remains a major obstacle to the implementation of a merit-based system. These issues have led to a decline in public trust in the objectivity of the village apparatus selection process and have the potential to result in a village apparatus that is not fully competency-based. On the other hand, the fact that some villages choose to conduct their own selection processes indicates a lack of uniformity in the mechanisms for recruiting village officials, which can lead to social conflict and differing perceptions regarding the legitimacy of the selection results. Inconsistencies in regulations regarding the authority of district governments to coordinate the recruitment of village officials also demonstrate that the merit-based system in village governance lacks a strong legal and institutional foundation. Therefore, the findings of this study indicate the need for reform of village official recruitment policies through the strengthening of regulations, the digitization of the selection system, increased oversight, and the development of inter-institutional collaboration to create a more professional, objective, transparent, and accountable village official recruitment process.

The findings indicate that the simultaneous recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency represents a significant institutional innovation compared to previous recruitment practices conducted independently by each village. The simultaneous recruitment mechanism has introduced greater standardization of administrative procedures, broader public access to recruitment information, and stronger coordination by the regency government. These improvements represent important progress toward the implementation of merit-based village governance. However, the findings also reveal that simultaneous recruitment alone is insufficient to ensure the realization of meritocracy. Weak oversight, the cancellation of the CAT system, regulatory inconsistencies, and the persistence of local patronage networks continue to undermine objectivity and fairness in the recruitment process. Therefore, simultaneous recruitment should be viewed as an important institutional step forward rather than a complete realization of a merit-based recruitment system. Achieving genuine meritocracy requires complementary reforms, including digitalization of recruitment, stronger regulatory harmonization, enhanced oversight mechanisms, and greater institutional capacity to prevent political intervention and recruitment fraud.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that the implementation of meritocracy in the simultaneous recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency has demonstrated the local government's efforts to create a more open, standardized, and accountable selection process through a simultaneous recruitment mechanism, collaboration with universities, and the widespread dissemination of information to the public. During the planning stage for village official needs, village governments are granted the authority to propose staffing allocations based on existing needs and vacant positions, ensuring that the process of filling village official positions is conducted in a structured manner. In practice, merit-based principles have begun to be applied through administrative requirements, written exams, and selection mechanisms aimed at providing equal opportunities to the public. However, the implementation of the merit system has not yet been optimal due to various obstacles, including both technical-administrative and political and cultural barriers. Technical obstacles are evident in the continued use of manual selection systems, the cancellation of the implementation of CAT, and the complexity of the registration process, which places a burden on the public. Meanwhile, political and cultural barriers are evident in the continued existence of fraudulent practices, alleged trading of positions, interference by certain individuals, and a culture of patronage in the recruitment process for village officials. Additionally, inconsistencies in regulations regarding the authority of local governments in the implementation of village official recruitment also pose a challenge to the realization of an effective merit-based system. This study has several limitations. First, the analysis is based primarily on secondary data, limiting direct insights into the perspectives of stakeholders involved in the recruitment process. Second, the study focuses only on the simultaneous recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency, so the findings may not be generalizable to other regions with different governance contexts. Future research is recommended to employ primary data collection and comparative studies across different regions to provide a more comprehensive understanding of merit-based recruitment implementation.

Therefore, the implementation of meritocracy in the recruitment of village officials in Tuban Regency still requires strengthening in terms of regulations, selection systems, oversight, and infrastructure support so that the goal of creating a professional, transparent, and ethical village government can be optimally achieved. Policy Recommendations from the results of this study:

1. The Tuban Regency Government needs to fully implement a CAT-based selection system to enhance objectivity, transparency, and accountability in the recruitment process for village officials

2. Local governments need to streamline and digitize administrative registration requirements so that the public can more easily access the selection process without being burdened by lengthy bureaucratic procedures
3. Oversight of the recruitment process for village officials needs to be strengthened through the involvement of universities, independent institutions, and the public in order to minimize collusion, nepotism, and local political interference
4. The central government and local governments need to harmonize regulations regarding the recruitment of village officials to ensure clarity regarding authority and to strengthen the legal basis for the implementation of a merit-based system in village governance
5. Local governments need to enhance their institutional capacity and information technology infrastructure through collaboration with universities and other institutions to support the implementation of a professional and modern selection process for village officials

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