

## School Leadership Preparation Project: A Multi-Case Study on Education Policy in South Sulawesi Province

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### Abstract:

This research investigates the School Leadership Preparation Project in South Sulawesi Province. The project consists of a series of activities designed to identify highly potential and experienced teachers who are prepared to take on additional responsibilities as school principals. The process involves two stages: (1) selection (comprising administrative and academic selection), and (2) education and training. This study critically examines the policy formulation, its implementation, and the outcomes in South Sulawesi Province. Data collection was conducted through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The individual data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (2014) flow model, which includes data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. For cross-case analysis, a comparative approach was employed as recommended by Yin (2002). The findings indicate that the School Leadership Preparation Project is more responsive to current needs than to future demands, as the political discretion of local leaders often outweighs adherence to central government policies. Moreover, the project is primarily attended by junior or low-tenure teachers, who may lack the leadership qualifications expected of prospective school leaders. The content of the school leadership preparation programs focuses more on leadership development rather than on managerial skills, school entrepreneurship, or educational supervision.

### Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menyelidiki Proyek Persiapan Kepemimpinan Sekolah di Provinsi Sulawesi Selatan. Proyek ini terdiri dari serangkaian kegiatan yang dirancang untuk mengidentifikasi guru-guru yang berpotensi dan berpengalaman yang siap untuk mengambil tanggung jawab tambahan sebagai kepala sekolah. Prosesnya meliputi dua tahap: (1) seleksi (terdiri dari seleksi administrasi dan akademik), dan (2) pendidikan dan pelatihan. Kajian ini mengkaji secara kritis perumusan kebijakan, implementasinya, dan outcome di Provinsi Sulawesi Selatan. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan analisis dokumen. Analisis data individu mengikuti model aliran Miles dan Huberman (2014), yang meliputi kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan/verifikasi. Untuk analisis lintas kasus, pendekatan komparatif digunakan seperti yang direkomendasikan oleh Yin (2002). Temuan-temuan yang ada menunjukkan bahwa Proyek Persiapan Kepemimpinan Sekolah lebih responsif terhadap kebutuhan saat ini dibandingkan tuntutan di masa depan, karena kebijaksanaan politik para pemimpin daerah seringkali melebihi kepatuhan terhadap kebijakan pemerintah pusat. Selain itu, proyek ini sebagian besar diikuti oleh guru-guru junior atau guru dengan masa jabatan rendah, yang mungkin tidak

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memiliki kualifikasi kepemimpinan yang diharapkan dari calon pemimpin sekolah. Isi program persiapan kepemimpinan sekolah lebih menitikberatkan pada pengembangan kepemimpinan dibandingkan keterampilan manajerial, kewirausahaan sekolah, atau supervisi pendidikan.

**Keywords:**

School Leadership, Preparation Project, Principals

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## Introduction

Education is one of the most crucial factors in human development. Through education, individuals can enhance their intelligence, skills, and overall potential. A school principal plays a significant role in improving the quality of education by fostering collaboration among teachers, directing their professional development, and ensuring that educational goals are achieved. Over the past decade, the professionalism of school management and the quality of school leadership have become central to educational policy agendas (Gumusa, 2015). Today, principals are expected to lead schools in a rapidly evolving educational landscape, facing unprecedented challenges, responsibilities, and managerial opportunities (Hess & Kelly, 2007). This study aims to analyze the role of school principals in enhancing education quality management at the elementary school level (Riani & Ain, 2022). The Indonesian government's latest "Freedom to Learn" policy, introduced by the Minister of Education and Culture, requires implementation across educational institutions at various levels. Principals play a crucial role in community empowerment, utilizing school resources to support the successful execution of this policy (Maisyaroh, Juharyanto, Bafadal, Wiyono, Ariyanti, Adha, & Qureshi, 2021). The Department of Education entrusts school principals with the critical responsibility of defining the strategic direction and growth of schools. As a result, teachers depend heavily on principals for guidance, particularly in their professional development, including the integration of 21st-century educational practices (Mthanti & Msiza, 2023). Then, effective school leadership goes beyond administrative duties; it involves the integration of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development, as well as curriculum integration, customized teaching methods, extracurricular activities, and collaborations to ensure student preparedness for future education. Research findings highlight the pivotal role of principals in formulating, implementing, and evaluating

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character-based school programs. Their involvement in program formulation, supervision, creating a supportive work environment, and evaluating programs through various measures is crucial for school success (Sofiah, Zaini, & Saihan, 2023).

Further, studies such as that by Khaleel, Alhosani, & Duyar (2021) in the UAE demonstrate the significant role of principals in fostering inclusive schools, particularly in the context of students with special needs. Principals' awareness of inclusive education was identified as a key factor in promoting inclusivity. This finding suggests the importance of professional development to enhance principals' understanding of inclusive practices, ensuring effective implementation of inclusive education policies. Globally, school leadership has become a policy priority, with an increased focus on school autonomy and improved educational outcomes. This shift underscores the need for professionalization of school leadership and support for current leaders, making school leadership an attractive career option for future candidates (Pont, Nusche, & Moorman, 2010). One of the main challenges in educational resource management has been the variability in the preparation of school principal candidates. This issue is explicitly addressed in Permendiknas No. 13/2007, which outlines the national standards for school principals, including academic qualifications, leadership competencies, and professional experience. In Indonesia, the preparation and selection process for school principals has become an essential topic of study, as principals are tasked with managing diverse schools and navigating complex issues of nationality, culture, and equality (Romanowski, Sadiq, Abu-Tineh, Ndoeye, & Aql, 2020). For over thirty years, instructional leadership has been considered an effective model for improving student achievement. This study investigates the instructional leadership practices of Indonesian school principals and the challenges they face in this context.

As school principals are responsible for improving school quality, it is vital that the preparation process emphasizes not only traditional management skills but also leadership competencies. In developed countries, principal candidates are assessed not just on their administrative abilities but also on their leadership capacity to enhance school performance. In Indonesia, there is a need to review the principal selection and preparation process to ensure that it aligns with the goal of improving education quality (Sholeh, Windasari, Lestari, & Widodo, 2023). A study of elementary school principals in Indonesia examined their performance in areas such as knowledge management, interpersonal communication, sensemaking of duties, and job satisfaction. The findings suggest that these factors—along with other known factors—can significantly influence the performance of school principals (Tampubolon & Tambunan, 2023). Then, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has also disrupted the career landscape, requiring school leaders to adapt to new challenges and opportunities. Research on Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for school leaders highlights the need for ongoing professional growth to navigate the impact of 4IR (Awodiji & Naicker, 2023). Newly appointed principals are expected to possess competencies in human resource management, financial management, legal aspects of school administration, curriculum

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development, and learning leadership. They must also build networks with peers and engage in mentorship programs to support their early career development.

The issue of school leadership in Indonesia is intrinsically linked to the systems and policies governing the preparation of school principals, which are often influenced by political discretion and local government policies. The process leading to the appointment of school principals is heavily shaped by regional political dynamics, which can affect the ability of principals to fulfill their leadership responsibilities. Several studies have highlighted the importance of leadership roles being instilled from the early stages of selecting prospective school leaders. Specifically, the role of school principals has increasingly been focused on their dual responsibility as learning leaders and change agents within the educational system. Research has shown that the responsibilities of school principals are expanding, with education systems worldwide increasingly entrusting them with the task of improving school performance. To produce professional and capable principals, the recruitment process must be carried out with transparency, accountability, and professionalism. The key stages of principal recruitment include: (a) nomination by the school or madrasah and/or supervisor, (b) administrative selection, and (c) academic selection. However, these processes are often bypassed or influenced by political interests, leading to challenges in leadership quality (Kurniawan, 2019).

The preparation of school leaders in Indonesia is motivated by several factors, including: (1) the purpose of recruiting qualified school principals, (2) the readiness for candidate recruitment, (3) the implementation of recruitment processes including administrative and academic selection, education and training, and the eventual appointment, and (4) ensuring that principals meet both administrative qualifications and leadership competencies (Jamali, 2016). These factors point to the need for a principal selection process that prioritizes professional development and leadership skills (Pereda et al., 2019). However, as principals' roles become more complex and demanding, the ability to attract and retain talented school leaders has become an increasing challenge (Aravena & González, 2021). A quantitative study involving four key stakeholder groups in principal selection identified four critical factors: Generic Managerial Skills, Communication and Presentation Skills, Experience, and Trust (Kwan & Walker, 2009). In the context of Israel's Arab Education System (AES), a study revealed the barriers prospective principals face, such as limited experience and reliance on expatriate vice principals or department heads to manage day-to-day operations (Arar, 2018). Similarly, a study examining leadership development programs across five different educational systems highlighted key characteristics of effective pre-service programs, particularly those associated with high educational performance (Walker, Bryant, & Lee, 2013). In some regions, such as the United Arab Emirates, newly appointed principals often face limited experience in the role, relying on senior staff for daily operational management. This reliance on external leadership creates a challenge in ensuring sustainable leadership development (Vuuren & Sayed, 2017). Meanwhile, in the United States, government initiatives on educational leadership development focus on core elements such as vision, strategic planning, and community engagement (Young,

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2022). The University of Colorado Boulder, for instance, launched a bachelor's degree program aimed at preparing students for leadership roles through a community-sourced, collaborative approach (Hildreth, 2018). Despite international efforts to improve school leadership, challenges persist. In many cases, the work of school principals has become increasingly intensive, leading to significant work-life imbalance. Research on principal turnover highlights that approximately one in every five schools experiences a change in principal each year, although the impact of principal turnover on school outcomes is still not fully understood (Henry & Harbatkin, 2019).

In Indonesia, there has been limited research addressing the role of principals in disadvantaged areas. A recent case study in remote areas of Indonesia revealed that school principals focus primarily on managing the scarcity of human resources, which impedes their ability to fulfill their roles as educators, managers, administrators, supervisors, leaders, innovators, and motivators. This study suggests that the primary challenge faced by principals is not their location but the lack of qualified teachers, which places a disproportionate burden on principals to carry out multiple roles (Mutiaraningrum, 2022). Further research on vocational school leadership in Indonesia highlights the entrepreneurial leadership exercised by principals in competitive and entrepreneurial-based schools. These principals employ strategies such as curricular innovation, empowering school staff, and fostering connections between the school and external stakeholders to improve student outcomes and ensure graduates' employability (Suyitno, Sonhadji, Arifin, & Ulfatin, 2014). The importance of developing comprehensive, adaptive leadership preparation programs that reflect regional autonomy and demographic factors is evident from global research. Studies suggest that the selection, training, and professional development pipeline for school principals should be a particular focus in the nation's most challenging districts and schools (Johnston, Walker, & Levine, 2010). This research underlines the need for policies that ensure principals are equipped with the leadership skills necessary to navigate complex educational environments and lead schools effectively.

## **Research Method**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a multi-case study design. The research was conducted in three locations: the Makassar City Education Office, the Pangkajene Islands Regency Education Office, and the Barru District Education Office, all situated in South Sulawesi Province. Data collection was carried out through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Data analysis followed the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) which involved data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. A cross-case analysis was also conducted by comparing the cases, in line with the recommendations of Yin (2002). To ensure the validity of the data, techniques such as Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability were applied. This research was classified as a qualitative study with a descriptive case study design. In this type of research, the focus was on a specific phenomenon or object, allowing for an in-depth investigation. The

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researcher positioned themselves as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis, which is typical of qualitative studies (Gunawan, 2014). The aim was to describe the actors, processes, assessment instruments, and recommendations for teachers being prepared for future leadership roles in South Sulawesi Province. Qualitative research, as compared to quantitative methods, is more exploratory and interpretive, designed to generate new insights rather than simply testing hypotheses (Sugiyono, 2020). In this study, data were collected through interviews, documentation, and direct observation. Interviews provided information on how assessments were conducted by principals and supervisors, while the researcher observed the candidate evaluation process. The researcher's role as both insider and outsider, participant and observer, was balanced to ensure transparency in the research activities. Observational data were recorded in field notes, which detailed events chronologically.

To guide the observations, the researcher used an observation guide developed prior to the research. This guide helped focus on the interaction between assessors (principals and supervisors) and candidates, the openness of the assessment process, and the instruments used—whether they were developed by the assessors themselves or adhered to specific policy standards. In addition to observations, the researcher documented the profiles of assessors, candidate leaders, guidance instruments, and assessment tools. Data analysis occurred both during and after data collection. The researcher gathered extensive data from multiple sources, such as interviews with assessors and candidates, field observations, and document analysis. The qualitative data analysis followed the model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2007), which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Then, data reduction was the first stage of analysis, during which the researcher summarized content from interactions with subjects, events, and situations in the field. Relevant documents were selected and condensed, while extraneous information was discarded. In the second stage, coding, the researcher organized the data into meaningful categories. This involved using symbols or summaries, structuring the codes, and increasing the level of detail in the coding process. The goal was to integrate all the data into a coherent system. The third stage involved objective note-taking, where the researcher accurately recorded, classified, and edited responses or situations. These notes were descriptive and helped to clarify the data. Finally, reflective notes were created to provide deeper insights into the analysis process. These notes helped identify patterns, trends, and relationships, guiding the final stages of the analysis.

The research utilized both individual case data analysis and cross-case analysis. For the multi-case design, two stages of analysis were necessary: individual case data analysis and cross-case data analysis (Yin, 1989). The case study approach is commonly used in social science disciplines such as sociology, industrial relations, and anthropology to explore complex phenomena (Hartley, 1994). It involves an in-depth investigation of one or more organizations or groups, with the aim of understanding the context and processes within the phenomenon being studied (Meyer & Meyer, 2016). In this study, the constant comparative method was applied, following procedural steps outlined by

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Glaser in Bogdan & Biklen (1998). Data collection began with interviews, observations, and document analysis. The researcher identified recurring themes and key issues emerging from the data, which served as focus categories. Additional data were then collected to explore these categories in more depth, considering the various dimensions of the phenomenon. As data were gathered, the researcher continuously identified new events and categories, refining the analysis. Finally, data management was crucial in this process. The researcher organized the data systematically and identified basic social processes and relationships within the study. By sampling, coding, and writing analysis based on the identified categories, the researcher was able to draw meaningful insights from the data. This process of data analysis involved carefully examining the data, organizing it into manageable units, and synthesizing it to uncover patterns, trends, and meaningful findings. The researcher worked to ensure that the analysis was thorough, systematic, and clear, providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Results**

Based on the data collected through in-depth interviews, documentation, and observation, several key findings emerged regarding the school leadership preparation project in South Sulawesi Province. The first significant finding was the critical role of policy support in determining the success and effectiveness of a policy program. In the case of the school leadership preparation project, policy support was expected to come from systems, policy actors, materials, and financing. However, in the three regions studied—Makassar city, Pangkajene Islands district, and Barru district—the support for the project was insufficient, especially within the policy-making environment itself. One major issue was the lack of support for information systems and a limited understanding of technical guidelines among policy actors involved in program implementation. This gap in support created opportunities for local authorities, particularly regional heads, to utilize their considerable powers as civil service officials to take policy actions, often influencing the process in ways that could be interpreted differently across districts. Furthermore, geographical conditions, such as the presence of remote areas and islands, presented additional challenges in policy implementation. These geographic factors led local governments to favor local policies over national directives, which in turn sometimes resulted in inconsistencies and misinterpretations during the school leadership preparation process.

Another key finding highlighted the partial assessment of teacher leadership potential and the involvement of external communities and institutions in the assessment process. The recruitment and appointment of school principals in the regions often failed to meet national standards due to the broad discretionary powers granted to regional heads in staffing decisions. Before assessments could take place, candidates for principal positions were typically proposed by the schools, with recommendations based on administrative factors and the candidates' performance as teachers. In practice, local

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governments took varied approaches to evaluating and recommending candidates, with some regions placing greater emphasis on administrative assessments, sometimes cross-verifying with institutions such as the regional civil service agency. However, there was a noticeable absence of collaborative assessment systems that combined evaluations from both supervisors and principals. In many instances, the role of supervisors was not fully utilized in the assessment process, leading to a scenario where assessments often served only as formalities rather than a meaningful evaluation of leadership potential. The process of principal appointment further revealed significant challenges. Appointments were frequently made based on seniority or experience as vice-principals, rather than on the capabilities or competencies of the candidates. This often resulted in the selection of candidates who were less qualified for the role. The appointment process also reflected a broader issue of bureaucratic inefficiencies, including mal-administrative behaviors, which hindered the effectiveness of the school leadership preparation program. In many instances, the education offices treated the principalship as a mere structural position, with appointments driven by political or bureaucratic considerations rather than by merit-based evaluations of leadership potential.

The education and training of school principal candidates was another critical aspect of the school leadership preparation program. According to Permendikbudristek Number 40 of 2021, candidates must undergo education and training as part of their selection process, known as the Master Teacher Program. This program provides both theoretical and practical experience for those who pass the recruitment selection. However, in practice, education and training were not always prioritized in the districts and municipalities. Often, local governments focused on quickly filling vacant principal positions rather than providing comprehensive training for candidates. As a result, many training activities were organized by vertical institutions rather than local education offices. This situation reflected the urgent need within district governments to fill principal vacancies promptly, sometimes at the expense of the quality of preparation. An important part of the recruitment process in the regions was the acceptability assessment, which evaluated how well a principal candidate's background and expertise matched the characteristics of the school. This assessment also considered factors such as the candidate's vision and mission for the school, their strategy for school development, and the relevance of their prior experience to the specific needs of the school. Communication skills and an understanding of the local culture were also seen as critical factors in the acceptability assessment. In some districts, public tests were used as a simple means of assessing a candidate's acceptability. These tests, which were more common in urban areas with better access to communication and media facilities, used mass media such as newspapers, local TV, and radio stations to gather public opinions on the candidates. However, the acceptability assessment process faced challenges in more heterogeneous areas, where issues related to ethnicity, religion, and race often complicated the assessment and placement of school principals. The research findings revealed significant gaps in the policy support, assessment practices, and training programs related to school leadership preparation in South Sulawesi. The insufficient



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support for policy implementation, coupled with the regional autonomy that allowed local governments to bypass national guidelines, resulted in inconsistencies and inefficiencies. Additionally, the recruitment process for school principals often lacked a robust and transparent system for evaluating leadership potential, and the bureaucratic challenges hindered the appointment of qualified candidates. Furthermore, while education and training programs were intended to equip school leaders with the necessary skills, they were often sidelined in favor of immediate appointments, compromising the long-term effectiveness of the leadership preparation project. These findings underscore the need for a more coherent and standardized approach to school leadership preparation in the region, one that aligns more closely with national policies while accommodating local conditions.

The compliance of local governments with the school leadership preparation project policy has been found to be relatively inconsistent. Since the implementation of regional autonomy, which granted local governments greater authority over education personnel management, many regional heads have exercised significant discretion, often making decisions that align with political considerations rather than adhering strictly to national regulations. This situation is compounded by overlapping regulations between the personnel career development system and the management of education personnel, which create room for local governments to make politically motivated decisions. In response to the national regulations for the school leadership preparation project, local authorities have adjusted policies to align with their preferences. When regulations were perceived as incompatible with local needs or political interests, they were frequently disregarded. Conversely, policies that aligned with regional priorities were treated as mandatory. A particular challenge in this context is the lack of effective planning for school principal needs, especially in relation to periodization, which should be managed according to the operational guidelines set out in the school leadership preparation project. Many local governments have neglected these planning requirements, which should ideally be updated every two years. Moreover, the absence of clear administrative sanctions or consequences for non-compliance, such as the delay in educator certification allowances for over-periodized principals, has meant that local governments have continued to bypass or inconsistently apply the regulations.

A second issue highlighted by the research concerns the limited budget allocation for the school leadership preparation project, which has negatively affected its effectiveness. The project has predominantly been managed by vertical institutions, with minimal funding allocated to ensure its proper implementation. This underfunding is evident in the lack of a properly functioning management information system, which is essential for the planning and management of the school leadership preparation process. At present, district governments have not fully integrated management information systems into their planning processes. Instead, local authorities continue to rely on traditional methods, such as manually observing field conditions, including the number of retiring principals and schools that need to be reorganized. This approach to estimating principal needs leads to a mismatch between the number of prepared

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principal candidates and the actual needs of the regions. As a result, local governments often fail to project the number of school principals required over a two-year period, which in turn creates inefficiencies in both the preparation and appointment of principals. Moreover, the mismatch between prepared principal candidates and those appointed has exacerbated the leadership preparation process. A significant issue identified in the research is the appointment of principals who have not undergone the necessary education and training or who do not possess the required credentials, such as a unique school principal number (NUKS). In contrast, many candidates who have completed the required preparation are not appointed in a timely manner, leading to a backlog of trained candidates awaiting assignments. This situation has been driven by the practice of appointing principals based on seniority or experience, rather than selecting those who are most qualified and prepared. This practice has led to frustration among principals who are transferred or promoted without having gone through the preparation process, or who remain in positions beyond their term limits. As a result, many principals have submitted resignation applications due to dissatisfaction with the system, further contributing to the instability in school leadership.

From the findings of the cross-case analysis, several conceptual propositions have been developed to address the formulation, implementation, and indicators of the school leadership preparation project policy. These propositions aim to improve the policy framework to better align it with both local and national needs, ensuring that compliance mechanisms are in place for effective implementation. One proposition is focused on the formulation of school leadership preparation project policy. It suggests that national and local education policies should be better aligned to ensure that school leadership preparation is prioritized and effectively implemented. This would involve creating a more robust policy framework that balances regional autonomy with national standards, ensuring that local governments' decisions are supportive of broader educational goals. Another proposition focuses on the implementation of the school leadership preparation project policy. It emphasizes the need for clear guidelines, regular training programs, and a transparent appointment process for school principals. This proposition calls for the development of standardized procedures for assessing principal candidates, conducting leadership training, and ensuring compliance with national regulations. It also stresses the need for consequences for non-compliance to ensure that local governments follow the procedures set out in the guidelines. Finally, the third proposition addresses the indicators of the implementation of the school leadership preparation project policy. It proposes the establishment of measurable indicators to assess the success of the project. These indicators would include the ratio of principals appointed through the preparation process, the extent of training and certification received by school principals, and the effectiveness of management information systems in forecasting principal needs. By establishing clear benchmarks for evaluating the success of the policy, local governments would be better equipped to assess the effectiveness of their school leadership preparation efforts and ensure that they are meeting the educational needs of local schools. These propositions provide a foundation for improving the implementation of

the school leadership preparation project, ensuring that local governments comply with national regulations, and ultimately enhancing the quality of education leadership in South Sulawesi.

***Policy Formulation of School Leadership Preparation Project***

The findings from the field research in Makassar City, Pangkajene Islands Regency, and Barru Regency in South Sulawesi Province highlight key insights regarding the formulation of policies for the school leadership preparation project. These insights are summarized in the following matrix table, which outlines the core elements of policy formulation across these three regions.

**Table 1.** Policy Formulation of the School Leadership Preparation Project

<b>Policy Footing of the School Leadership Preparation Project</b>	<b>Planning for Projected Principal Needs</b>	<b>Policy Support in the School Leadership Preparation Project Program</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The local government's rationale for the school leadership preparation project is based more on current real needs than on future needs.</li> <li>2. The adjustment of national and local policies requires local governments to develop terms of reference for the implementation of school leadership preparation projects.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. In planning for the projected needs of prospective school principals, it begins with collecting data in the field to determine the number of prospective school principals to be prepared.</li> <li>2. Planning is based more on the wishes of policy makers so that the projected needs of prospective principals are more centralized in the staffing sub-section of the education office rather than delegating to the Regional Technical Implementation Unit in the sub-district.</li> <li>3. The lack of a data collection system in planning activities reflects that the initiative to implement the school leadership preparation project is based more on the wishes or considerations of policy makers than on the needs in the field.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The head of the region has the authority as a supervising official in the region to transfer, demote, and promote school principals, including to establish partnerships with vertical institutions of the central government.</li> <li>2. The policy formulation of school leadership preparation projects in the regions has not been fully supported by the policy tools because there are still multiple interpretations in understanding national and local regulations.</li> <li>3. The regional or geographical conditions consisting of several remote areas make it possible for local governments to refer more to local policies in school leadership preparation projects.</li> </ol>

**Source:** Data Analysis of Prepositional Findings across Cases in Makassar City, Pangkajene Islands Regency and Barru Regency

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Needs projection is an essential first step for district governments in recruiting prospective school principals. In Makassar City, Pangkajene Islands Regency, and Barru Regency, the projections are based on the tenure of current principals. This includes those in their first four years, those in their second period (eight years of service), and those who have exceeded the periodization limit. An education office official, wishing to remain anonymous, explained that projections are made by considering principal tenure and anticipated vacancies due to retirements or term limits. However, this approach often focuses more on immediate needs rather than long-term planning for school leadership. The following is his narrative:

"I think the data is owned by the office. The Head and Secretary of the Office know the most about the basis for the projection of the needs of prospective school principals, but I try to explain that the basis for consideration includes: The number of principals who are in the first term, principals who are in the second term, and principals who have exceeded two terms. Then the needs analysis is conducted, where we examine again whether it is necessary to recruit prospective school principals or not based on the available data..." (I.01.4.5.1-10/W/HS)

In terms of planning, data collected from interviews and direct observation reveal that the projection of the need for prospective school principals in Makassar City begins with data gathering through the UPTD office and supervisors to identify potential candidates. The process proceeds with the appointment, acceptability assessment, and placement of principals. The first step involves creating a school leadership preparation project guide, followed by an open registration for candidates. The registration process is managed directly by the education office, without input or recommendations from the UPTD or supervisors. This was confirmed by an education office official, who requested anonymity, during an interview at his office. The following is his statement:

"In my opinion, planning should start from collecting valid data, not making it up. We do planning for the projected needs of prospective principals by collecting data from all schools. The recruitment process starts from registration, written test, interview, and then appointment. However, before the appointment is made, we first conduct an acceptability assessment to determine which prospective principals will be placed in a particular school." (I.01.4.5.1-10/W/HS)

Policy support for the preparation of school principal candidates involves not only regional heads or key officials in the education office but also technical tools such as the availability of accurate data, the understanding of the policy by field implementers, and the level of acceptance by schools and communities. The absence of a well-maintained personnel database means the education office must directly visit schools to gather real-time data on needs. One informant shared:

"Of course, we refer to the regulation of the Minister of National Education. As I mentioned earlier, the data available in schools become our reference to determine the real number of school principal candidates needed. Thus, the needs analysis in filling the principal position is always based on the real conditions in the field.." (I.05.33.6.1-13/W/AP)

The findings suggest that there is no dedicated staffing database for planning the projected needs of prospective school principals. Consequently, policy formulation has not been fully supported by essential policy tools, such as a comprehensive principal database or the involvement of supervisors in developing the terms of reference for principal preparation.

### ***Implementation of School Leadership Preparation Projection Policy***

The following are propositions from the field findings in Makassar City, Pangkajene Islands Regency, and Barru Regency in South Sulawesi Province, presented in the matrix table:

**Tabel 2.** Implementation of School Leadership Preparation Projection Policy

<b>Teacher Assessment as a Principal Candidate</b>	<b>Education and Training for Teacher Activator Program</b>	<b>Principal Appointment</b>
1. The assessment of principal candidates is fragmented, leading to the involvement of external community and institutional actors in the assessment process.	1. The education and training of prospective school leaders is not yet a mandatory requirement within the regions, as it remains predominantly managed by vertical institutions.	1. The absence of a continuous and systematic evaluation framework results in the generalized appointment of school principals as structural positions.
2. The focus of principal candidate assessments is predominantly on administrative aspects, with limited attention to academic and leadership competencies.	2. The urgency within local governments to fill school principal vacancies often undermines the routine and structured implementation of education and training programs.	

Field data indicate that in Makassar City, the assessment of teacher candidates for principal positions follows a cross-checking procedure. This method involves combining assessments from both the school supervisor and the Regional Personnel Agency (BKD). The primary aim of this approach is to evaluate candidates' integrity and professional performance during their teaching tenure. As explained by an official from the Makassar City Education Office:

“For the principal candidate assessment system, we empower our supervisors and at the same time coordinate with the Makassar City Regional Personnel Agency to assess principal candidates. What has been done by us is to conduct a cross-check assessment between school supervisors and the BKD, including the inspectorate. So between these elements we collaborate. The value of the principal candidate coming from the supervisor is traced back through the BKD, that is it true that the person concerned is capable of being prepared to become a principal candidate, who knows the candidate concerned has a bad track record for his performance as an ASN”. (I.11.4.1-11/W/HS)

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This statement suggests that the assessment system for principal candidates in Makassar City is characterized by a collaborative, cross-institutional approach. However, this system tends to prioritize the evaluation of candidates' integrity over their academic or leadership potential. Furthermore, the roles of supervisors and principals are largely limited to providing recommendations, without directly engaging in assessments aligned with the technical and implementation guidelines of the school leadership preparation program. This indicates a need for a more comprehensive, cohesive, and integrated approach to the candidate assessment process, one that fully adheres to the established policies and regulations governing school leadership preparation.

In the sub-dimension of education and training for prospective school principals, field data from Makassar City revealed that the implementation of training programs for principal candidates is not fully integrated into the local policy for preparing prospective principals. Interviews with several informants revealed insights into how the city government approached training for future school leaders, which was not considered a primary stage in the school leadership preparation process. One informant, a former school principal, noted:

When I was a teacher, as far as I know, the city government never specifically held training for prospective school principals. Before the enactment of Permendikbudristek No. 40 of 2021, education and training for prospective principals was known as the teacher mobilizer program. However, at that time, Cakep training was not mandatory for teachers who would be promoted to principal because the organizers were the Ministry of Education, such as LPMP and P4TK. Therefore, we did not consider it a key requirement. I myself am a former junior high school principal who participated in the training, but it seems that it was only as a reinforcement before taking up the position.

Historically, principal candidate training in Makassar City was organized by vertical institutions, such as LPMP South Sulawesi and LPPKSPS Surakarta, through specific principal preparation programs. However, with the introduction of the independent learning policy, this program gradually faded and ceased entirely by 2021, following the COVID-19 pandemic. In its place, a new format for education and training for teachers, referred to as the "teacher mobilizer" program, was introduced and managed by the Ministry of Education, Research, and Technology.

The field data further revealed that the local government in Makassar City adopted an alternative approach to the training process, based on the large number of teachers eligible to be appointed as principals. The urgency to fill principal positions led to a reverse process: teachers were appointed as principals first, and then training was provided afterward. One informant emphasized the practical challenges faced by local governments:

"In our local government, teachers are often appointed first and then attend training, whether it is training organized by the ministry or the municipality. The number of teachers on the waiting list to be appointed as principals is very large, reaching hundreds of people. If training becomes the main

standard, the number will increase because training is not always held regularly. If we have to wait for the results of the training first, it will be even more troublesome.." (I.02.13.2.5-17/W/HS)

The appointment of school principals in Makassar City, both before and after the era of regional autonomy, has remained a significant issue. It is common for teachers to be appointed as principals without undergoing a structured preparation process. This situation reflects broader dynamics in several regions of South Sulawesi Province, where the appointment of school principals is often highly dependent on the leadership and policies of incumbent local government officials. Several key phenomena emerge from this situation: first, the appointment of school principals is not typically based on the results of education and training programs. Second, the principal appointment system remains closely linked to structural positions within local government administrations. Third, there has been insufficient coordination and communication between private schools (foundations) and local government authorities regarding the appointment and preparation of school principals. These findings point to a need for a more systematic and coordinated approach to the appointment and preparation of school leaders, in alignment with national policies and the educational needs of local communities.

***Impact of the School Leadership Preparation Project Policy***

The following propositions are drawn from the field findings in Makassar City, Pangkajene Islands Regency, and Barru Regency in South Sulawesi Province, as summarized in the matrix table below:

**Table 3.** The impact of the School Leadership Preparation Project Policy

<b>Budget Availability in the School Leadership Preparation Project</b>	<b>Accuracy of Teaching Staff Management Information System</b>	<b>Ratio of Teachers Appointed Based on the Results of the Teacher Training Program</b>
-	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Manual and digital information systems are utilized for projecting the needs of principal candidates.</li> <li>2. The school database has not been effectively leveraged as a reference for filling principal positions.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The number of school principal appointments that are not based on the preparation results exceeds those that are, as regional heads exercise their discretionary authority within the framework of applicable regulations.</li> <li>2. Some principal candidates meet the administrative and academic requirements but have not been appointed by the local government.</li> <li>3. The implementation of periodization regulations has led to a significant number of principals resigning due to exceeding the prescribed tenure limits.</li> </ol>

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Local governments have made incremental adjustments to national policy directives, yet several factors continue to impede full implementation. These challenges include a disproportionately high number of teachers aspiring to become principals, relative to the limited number of available positions, insufficient budget allocation, and the lack of robust supervisory mechanisms, such as the involvement of school supervisors. An informant from a local government office remarked on the differing interpretations of the technical guidelines for preparing school principal candidates, as outlined in the following statement:

Since the implementation of Permendiknas No. 40 of 2021, we have begun to slowly adjust the central government's policy with the regional head's policy. We have to slowly adjust to the wishes of the central government, because our leaders also have other considerations in the appointment of school principals. As evidence, we have coordinated and consulted with the Ministry of Education in the preparation of TOR or guidelines in the preparation of prospective school principals that we will later apply. And the Directorate of School Principals at the Ministry has welcomed the idea of our regional heads to implement the auction system for school principal positions. (I.02.14.1.1-10/W/HS)

The Makassar City Government has been systematically adjusting its policies to align with the national directives on the preparation of prospective school principals. This process has involved institutional coordination and consultation with the Ministry of Education to develop a standardized framework for principal preparation, including the consideration of implementing a job auction system for appointing principals. However, the effective implementation of this central policy has been hampered by the overwhelming number of teachers seeking principal positions, in contrast to the limited availability of such positions. Moreover, there exists a divergence in perspectives between supervisors and structural officials regarding national policies. While structural officials tend to adopt an administrative and procedural approach, supervisors generally favor a more normative, compliance-driven response, thereby complicating the policy's implementation at the local level.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study provide a significant contribution to enhancing the understanding of the school leadership preparation process, particularly in the context of a locally autonomous region such as South Sulawesi Province. The findings of this study both align with and diverge from previous research in several key areas:

### ***Leadership and the Influence of Political Discretion***

Previous studies, such as those by Kwan & Walker (2009), have pointed out that in many countries, the recruitment of school principals is often dominated by administrative and political considerations rather than focusing on comprehensive professional qualifications. Similarly, Orr & Orphanos (2011) highlighted that faculty investments in preparation programs and the quality of internships significantly



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contribute to the leadership knowledge and practices of graduates, influencing school improvement. These studies suggest that leadership preparation is critical to enhancing the effectiveness of school leaders and improving educational outcomes. The initial findings of this study support this view, revealing that while principal training in Indonesia has been standardized and is now a mandatory part of the certification process, political influences continue to play a significant role in principal appointments (Sumintono, Sheyoputri, Jiang, Misbach, & Jumintono, 2015). Despite efforts toward social justice, the policy for school principalship, as noted by Moorosi (2021), has been criticized for being "colour-blind," neglecting the broader social dynamics and the influence of school leaders, particularly principals, in shaping these dynamics within schools. This study contributes to this discourse by emphasizing that in South Sulawesi Province, the appointment of school principals remains heavily influenced by the political discretion of regional heads, which distorts the implementation of national policies. This political influence results in appointments that are often not based on transparent, competency-based selection processes.

Furthermore, findings from previous research, such as those by Devi and Fernandes (2019) and Styron & LeMire (2009), stress the importance of effective leadership preparation programs that address the specific needs of diverse populations, which has not been fully realized in the context of South Sulawesi. The study also highlights the importance of revisiting selection and training processes to ensure that principals are selected based on proper criteria and provided with relevant preparation (Gurmu, 2020). In line with Dickens, McBrayer, Pannell, & Fallon (2021), this study also underscores the need for collaborative, sustainable professional learning in school districts to better prepare competent school leaders. The study's findings extend these discussions by showing that, in the context of regional autonomy in Indonesia, the interpretation and implementation of national education policies often vary at the local level. Regional heads, wielding significant political power, are able to tailor policies to fit local needs, which can lead to disparities in the application of school leadership preparation policies. As a result, while national policies may provide a general framework, local governments often adapt or ignore these policies based on political considerations, leading to inconsistencies in the preparation and appointment of school principals across regions. This highlights a critical gap in the alignment between national policy and local implementation, a factor that has significant implications for the effectiveness of school leadership preparation in Indonesia.

### ***Lack of Principal Education and Training***

Previous studies, such as those conducted by Ng & Szeto (2016), emphasize the critical importance of continuous education and training for aspiring principals. Leadership training and administrative experience are key components of a sponsored mobility model, where candidates participate in district- or school-sponsored programs that combine leadership development with administrative experience. This model effectively constitutes a pipeline to the principalship (Berry & Reardon, 2022). Similarly, research in Greece highlighted the importance of taking training into account during the

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selection process for principal positions, stressing the need for appropriate training to be integrated into the career trajectory of prospective leaders (Zervoudakis, Mastrothanas, Tsafarakis, Krassadaki, & Kyriakidis, 2024). Further studies by Sandó, Prada, Sarduy, & Ramírez (2018) suggest that enhancing school management preparation during initial training, accrediting pre-service programs, and promoting postgraduate academic training should be prioritized as means to improve the didactic and methodological aspects of principal preparation. Gumusa (2015) found that principals reported that key pre-service training elements, including internships and courses taken during graduate studies, were essential to their professional development. This is consistent with Basuki, Riyanto, & Nurlaela (2022), who observed significant improvements in the competence of principals who underwent the In-On-In model of education and training. Additionally, Enterieva (2022) stressed the importance of managerial and leadership training within both pre-service and in-service programs, with an emphasis on instructional leadership to enhance educational quality. However, the current research indicates that, despite the recognized value of formal education and training, these stages are often regarded as mere formalities in South Sulawesi. Limited resources and local policies that prioritize short-term needs, such as filling vacant principal positions, have contributed to the underutilization of education and training programs as critical components of the principal preparation process. This gap underscores the need for a more rigorous and sustained approach to leadership training to adequately prepare school leaders for their roles.

### ***Role of Supervisors in the Selection Process***

The role of school supervisors in the selection of principals is another area that has been widely studied. Research by Slater, Garcia Garduno, & Mentz (2018) underscores the importance of school supervisors in assessing and recommending candidates based on their leadership abilities. However, this study found that in South Sulawesi, the role of school supervisors in the principal selection process tends to be formal and limited. Supervisors are typically involved in the administrative aspects of the process, providing basic assessments that do not fully assess the leadership competencies of prospective principals. This practice aligns with Burns and Badiali's (2015) findings, which suggest that when supervisors combine supervision and evaluation roles, the result is often an experience of distress and disconnection for the intern, undermining the effectiveness of the selection process. The findings of Lee & Mao (2023) support the idea that principal recruitment and selection should involve more than just formal processes; it requires a deep consideration of leadership qualities and competencies. The lack of meaningful involvement from supervisors in the selection process compromises the quality of principal assessments, which are often based on seniority or political recommendations rather than objective leadership criteria. This issue highlights the need for more comprehensive mentoring and monitoring practices for supervisors, as suggested by Caayaman (2023), who advocates for the creation of formal policies that intensify these practices. Polymeropoulou & Sorkos (2024) similarly found that in Greece, the selection of school principals is influenced by factors unrelated to merit or equity, such as political

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considerations and a top-down approach to policymaking. Khanal & Regmi (2024) also noted that excessive politicization and a lack of transparency in school management have led to implementation failures. This mirrors the situation in South Sulawesi, where the insufficient involvement of supervisors and the dominance of seniority and political factors in the selection process have contributed to the reduced quality of leadership in schools. The failure to adequately assess principal candidates has significant implications for school performance and student outcomes. In conclusion, the lack of active and meaningful involvement from supervisors in the principal selection process not only undermines the objectivity and fairness of the assessment but also diminishes the potential for school leaders to be selected based on their actual leadership competencies. This, in turn, has the potential to negatively impact the overall quality of school leadership and, consequently, student achievement.

## **Conclusion**

This research provides valuable insights into the implementation of the school leadership preparation policy in South Sulawesi Province, emphasizing several key factors that influence its success. Local political discretion, the lack of a consistent evaluation and training system, and geographical challenges emerge as significant determinants. These findings underscore the complexity of applying national educational policies in regions with local autonomy, where policies are often shaped by local contexts and priorities. One of the primary recommendations from the study is to strengthen cooperation between central and local governments to ensure that national education policies are consistently applied across regions. Such coordination can reduce variations in policy implementation and improve the overall effectiveness of educational reforms. Furthermore, this study contributes to understanding the dynamics of school leadership in autonomous regions, highlighting the importance of overcoming both political and geographical constraints. Specifically, managing or minimizing local political influences is critical for ensuring that educational decision-making is based on merit and professional criteria, rather than political considerations. This would foster a more transparent and competency-based approach to the selection and training of school leaders. On the other hand, addressing geographical challenges, such as remote locations or inadequate infrastructure, is essential to ensure that leadership training and development opportunities are accessible to educators in all regions, particularly those in more isolated areas. In conclusion, this research significantly advances the understanding of school leadership in the context of regional autonomy in Indonesia. By identifying the challenges posed by political and geographical constraints, the study offers recommendations that can help improve the quality of educational leadership. These findings provide essential insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders on how to manage these challenges and create a more effective system for preparing and supporting school leaders, ultimately leading to enhanced educational outcomes across the country.

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## Ethical Statement

This research strictly adheres to ethical guidelines, ensuring that all data collected through interviews and documentation remains confidential. Participants were fully committed to the agreed-upon research procedures established by the Faculty of Education at the State University of Makassar, as well as our local government partners. To protect the privacy of the research subjects, the names of all informants have been anonymized.

## CRedit Authorship Contribution Statement

The authors of this study have worked collaboratively to develop and complete the research, with each author contributing in distinct ways. The specific contributions of each author are outlined below:

- **Author 1:** Responsible for gathering ideas and determining the research methods.
- **Author 2:** Focused on interpreting and analyzing the data.
- **Author 3:** Responsible for drafting the writing systematics.
- **Author 4:** In charge of editing, defining schedules, organizing the roles of the research team, securing financing, and connecting with research partners.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest in the publication of this research.

## Data Availability

The datasets generated and analyzed during the current study are available upon reasonable request.

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