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## 1 Education Partnerships between Local Education Authorities and Universities: A Promising Strategy but Undeveloped

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**Abstract:** Education partnerships (EP) between local education authorities (LEAs) and universities including teacher training institutes (LPTK) are seen as sine qua non to improve and develop the service and quality of education. EP is one key strategy to leverage education improvement initiatives in the current education reform and decentralization. This paper presents the description of EP that exists between Makassar State University as LPTK and all LEAs in the province of South Sulawesi as well as to see the constraints and needs for partnerships in developing and improving education services and quality at local level. A quantitative method by using survey design was employed. A total population sampling was applied to 24 LEAs in the province of South Sulawesi who completed a 21-item questionnaire regarding the research variables. LEA in general have positive perception and attitude towards the importance and power of EP in their efforts to develop and improve education in their regions. The findings reveal EP between LEAs and LPTK have existed and manifested in various education improvement activities. However, there is a discrepancy between the actual needs of LEAs and the existing activities/programs in the current EP. In conclusion, EP is a promising strategy for education improvement, but it is undeveloped in its process and implementation.

**Keywords:** education partnership, decentralization, local education authorities, teacher training institutes

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## INTRODUCTION

Partnerships that link universities with educational authorities to address educational problems can be seen as promising strategy to better develop and transform education. Universities can conduct research and practice in areas within educational authorities' responsibilities. Educational authorities can get helps and assistances improving and developing process and quality of education in their regions. Partnerships can be a means of delivering and achieving more values and results by making better use of existing resources and by bringing together complimentary services (Baumfield & Butterworth, 2007). Partnerships enable accomplishments that are impossibly achieved individually (Walsh & Backe, 2013).

The study reported in this paper takes place in the context of education and government reform in Indonesia. One of the greatest marks of education reform in Indonesia is the decentralization of education system. As per law number 32-year 2004 regarding local government, governments at local level, provinces and districts, are held responsible for organizing, managing and administering education affairs and services. After a historic period of a highly centralized, top-down model of national educational governance, local education authority (LEA) as an agency overseeing education at provinces and districts currently find themselves in a decentralized system in which they have unprecedented authority over the organization and management of education in their regions. Over two decades of decentralization process, however, LEAs' performances on improving and developing service and quality of local education appear to result in no significance changes (for examples, Aini, 2010; Kristiansen & Pratikno, 2006; Kuswandi, 2014).

The decentralization gives LEA plenty opportunities to develop and improve the service and quality of their local education. Yet, LEA often finds difficulties to plan, design and implement educational improvement policies and programs of their own. According to Kuhon (2020), many LEAs fail to successfully pursue their new responsibilities because of lack of experiences and unwillingness to change. Rahman (2016), for example, found that LEAs' different capacities to develop teacher professional development (TPD) programs for their local teachers results in low and uneven distribution of teachers' TPD participation. A report from the World Bank highlights challenges faced by LEAs to provide differentiated supports to schools (World Bank, 2010). Therefore, it is highly recommended that LEAs improve their capacity if they are to provide quality education improvement programs. One of the strategic ways is to collaborate with other stakeholders who have assets (e.g., knowledge,

experiences, and expertise) to support their programs. Universities serving as teacher training institutes (hereinafter called LPTK) is one stakeholder with huge capitals that LEAs can partner with to improve their capacities and to support their quality education improvement programs.

Education partnership has been one of the key successes of education in developed countries. For many years, education partnership between LPTK and LEA has existed in countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Green et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2016; McLaughlin et al., 2006). The common underlying conviction is that collaboration, partnership and or networking among stakeholders in education have great possibility to optimise learning process and achievement. LPTK has professional (educators, experts, and researchers) with experiences and expertise in various education disciplines that can be utilised by other education stakeholders. Wissema (2009) suggested that universities are centres of knowledge production by which universities can create answers, solutions and innovations to educational problems and challenges faced by education systems.

Indonesia's education has undergone numerous changes in accordance with problems and challenges it faces. In the era before the reformation, the focus of education was geared towards the increase and expansion of education access by massively building and opening new schools to succeed compulsory education (Tilaar, 1995). Along with the ongoing reforms and educational advancements that have been achieved such as the continued increase in the enrollment rate and the decline in the dropout rate, the focus of education development has begun to shift to development and improvement of the quality of education. In the last two decades, approaches to increasing funding, standardisation-accreditation and teacher certification have been applied to improve the quality of education in Indonesia (Kemdikbud, 2020). Fulfillment of the 20% allocation of funds for education continues to be pursued as a form of commitment to improving the quality of education. The process of attaining the eight national standards is generally carried out through an accreditation process. Raharjo et al. (2018, p. 130) stated that "school accreditation can be used as a measure of the achievement of the quality of a school because accreditation is one of the instruments from the government to determine the condition of the quality of education". Quality teachers are the key to quality educational services, processes and outcomes. Teacher certification can simply be seen as an effort to professionalise teachers. Tusriyanto (2017) emphasises that for teachers, certification must be seen as a means or instrument to improve quality or competence and not a goal. Indonesia's education policies and practices are now driven by efforts to improve and develop the quality of education.

However, the government recognises that the quality of education in Indonesia is still lagging behind other countries and the disparity in the quality of education between regions is still high (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). According to Rivai and Murni (2009), there are three factors that contribute the low and uneven quality of education. The first factor is that the policy and implementation of national education still employs a production function (input-output) approach. This approach places educational institutions as production units where if all the required inputs are met, the desired output will be produced. Whereas the process is very decisive and has an effect on the output of education. The second factor is the administration of education which is carried out in a bureaucratic-centralised manner. The administration of education in this way places education actors (offices, school principals, teachers and other educators) in the regions mainly as "executors" of direction/policies of the central bureaucrats which tend to be long and convoluted and sometimes not addressing and accommodating local contexts and conditions. As a result, education stakeholders at the regional level lose their independence, motivation, creativity and initiative to develop and improve education in their regions. The third factor relates to the minimal participation/involvement of education stakeholders, practitioners as well as the community. As a result, education actors, education practitioners and the community feel they are not part of and are not responsible for any education improvement initiatives.

Based on these three factors, efforts to improve quality education can be achieved by optimising and synergising education stakeholders. The involvement of education stakeholders in improving and developing the quality of education can be pursued in several ways, one of which is by creating education partnerships. The term of partnership is generally found and used in economics or industry which means an agreement or arrangement between two or more individuals or organisations to conduct a business and share obligations and profits between them. In simple term, partnership can be interpreted as a relationship and interaction between two or more parties to carry out a joint business or activity to achieve a goal.

When the term partnership used in education, it has a special meaning that is influenced by the nature of the field of education. Elezi and Bamber (2018) provide a definition of education partnership as two or more education institutions that jointly carry out an activity that will give more value to the educational services they run. It was further explained that an education partnership is a relationship between educational institutions where parties involved in the relationship work for the same result, namely maximising and developing learning and outcomes for students. On the other hand, Oates and Bignell (2019) define partnerships as collaborations between institutions to facilitate the sharing of practices and information across existing educational services. In terms of specific partnerships involving universities, I'Anson and Eady (2017) explicate partnerships as a form

of knowledge exchange between universities and other education stakeholders. From several definitions above, it is clear that education partnerships involve two or more educational stakeholders who work together in activities, projects or programs to develop and improve service and quality of education.

Oates and Bignell (2019) explained that what happens in partnerships between a university or LPTK and education stakeholders is the meeting point of theory, research and learning practices. That is, the partnership eliminates the impression LPTK as an ivory tower, the exclusive owner of knowledge and expertise and the gap between theory and practice. The partnership opens up space LPTK to be able to sit side by side and be equal with other education stakeholders (Peel et al., 2002). Baumfield and Butterworth (2007) add that there has been a shift in the pattern of partnership between LPTK and education stakeholders where the principle of partnership and collaboration is more emphasised than the view that knowledge or theory belongs to universities/LPTKs.

Education partnerships between LPTK and education stakeholders such as schools or education authorities have been going on for a long time. At first, this partnership was more about the need for LPTKs to get a practicum place for their student-teachers or the need for LPTK to get a research site (Brady, 2002; Walsh & Backe, 2013). Over time, the focus of the partnership began to penetrate and focus more on the needs of LPTKs' partners. Baumfield and Butterworth (2007) summarise three common educational areas that LPTK generally and education stakeholders are partner with: pre-service training, continuing professional development, consulting, and research. Similarly, Walsh and Backe (2013) reported that LPTK's partnership with education stakeholders focus on several general areas in education such as teacher training and professional development, curriculum, and school leadership.

Education partnerships are gaining popularity because they are considered an effective way of doing things with minimal effort. That is, by partnering existing resources can be more fully utilised and existing services can be combined to provide added value (Baumfield & Butterworth, 2007). He also added that partnerships are more likely to stimulate innovation and synergy as well as become emancipatory in the formation of new relationships and work systems. Elezi and Bamber (2018) explain that the mission of an education partnership is to enable partners to achieve collaboratively what is individually impossible. Partnerships are generally established because of the need by one party/partner and the capacity of the other party/partner to provide assistance or facilitation (Walsh & Backe, 2013).

In Indonesia's national and local context, partnerships between LPTK and LEA are still minimally conducted and reported. Saito et al. (2007) indicate that LPTK partnerships with education stakeholders in Indonesia tend to be informal and on a voluntary basis and in practice are less explored. The research reported in this paper attempts to look at the picture of the partnership that exists between Makassar State University as LPTK and all LEAs in the province of South Sulawesi as well as to see the constraints and needs for partnerships in developing and improving education services and quality at local level.

## METHODS

The study reported in this paper employed quantitative method by using survey design to find out description of education partnership between LPTK and LEAs in the province of South Sulawesi. The design was a cross-sectional survey type. In cross-sectional survey type research, data from research respondents (samples) are collected at a point in time (Creswell, 2008). Questionnaires are given to respondents at the same time point to see their current attitudes, beliefs or opinions on the research variable being investigated. The target population was person in charge (PIC) like head of office (Kepala Dinas) or head of division (Kepala Bidang) of LEA (Dinas Pendidikan) in the province of South Sulawesi which consists of 24 LEAs. Considering the small number of target populations, total population sampling was applied. Therefore, all the 24 LEAs were taken as the research sample.

A questionnaire consisting of 21 items was developed for the survey. The questionnaire contains a combination of closed and open-ended questions/statements. For closed questions, Likert scale and rating scale are used to assess, measure or classify the attitudes, opinions, perceptions of respondents. While open-ended questions are used to provide opportunities for respondents to provide answers (attitudes, opinions, and perceptions) that are typical or specific to their circumstances. Of the 21 questionnaire items, 9 items seek responses on the importance EP with educational stakeholders in general and with LPTK in particular. 6 questionnaire items collect responses on the types of EP activities, frequency, quantity and budget of EP. The other 6 questionnaire items capture respondents' attitudes or perceptions on enabling and hindering factors for the process and implementation of EP and satisfaction towards educational partnership between LEA and LPTK.

The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques. It contains statistical procedures for summarizing, organizing or simplifying research data by producing statistical measures such as average, frequency, percentage, data concentration, data spread, and the tendency of a data set (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2007). The results of descriptive statistical analysis are then presented in the form of tabulations,

graphs and diagrams to show the characteristics, general description, and trends in attitudes, opinions, and perceptions of the research variables. Nominal and ordinal data obtained from data collection were calculated using statistical measures.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

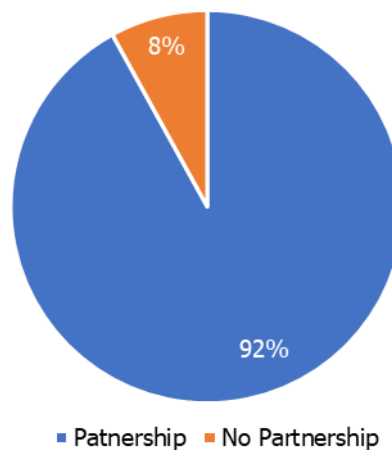
The findings are presented around the three main related variables of the study. The first part presents a description of the existing or established education partnerships between Makassar State University (UNM) as a LPTK and LEAs in the province of South Sulawesi. The next part describes the partnership programs/activities needed by the LEAs in improving and developing services and quality education in accordance with their local conditions. At the last part, the problems and obstacles faced by the LEAs in establishing and executing partnerships with LPTK are presented.

Education partnerships can occur or be established if education stakeholders, in this case the LEAs, have a positive perception towards partnership. The first item in the questionnaire asks respondents' opinions on how important the education partnership between LEA and other education stakeholders is in improving and developing the quality of education in the regions. Table 1 shows that in general authorities at LEAs agree to strongly agree that partnership is an important thing to do and is the key success to improve and develop the quality of education in their regions.

**Table 1.** Perceptions of LEAs on Education Partnership with Education Stakeholders

Statement	Agree	Strongly Agree	Combined
Partnerships between LEA and education stakeholders in developing and improving education in the regions are important.	25%	75%	100%
LEA's partnership with education stakeholders is one of the keys to successful development and improvement of education in the regions.	38%	62%	100%
Without partnerships between LEAs and education stakeholders, the development and improvement of education will be difficult to achieve.	71%	21%	92%

In addition to positive perceptions towards education partnerships, the importance of education partnerships between LEA and education stakeholders can also be seen from the presence/existence or absence of partnerships. Figure 1 shows that 92% of LEAs in South Sulawesi province have or have conducted educational partnerships with other education stakeholders.



**Figure 1.** Presence or Absence of Education Partnership between LEAs and Education Stakeholders

When asked to name the education stakeholders in question, government education and training institutions such as the Education Quality Assurance Agency (LPMP), the Institute for the Development and Empowerment of School Principals and School Supervisors (LPPKSPS), the Institute for the Development and Empowerment of Educators and Education Personnel (LP3TK) and several other private education organizations such as the Sampoerna Foundation, the National Learning Teacher Community (KGBN) and course institutions are mentioned. Universities such as Makassar State University as LPTK are also among the stakeholders

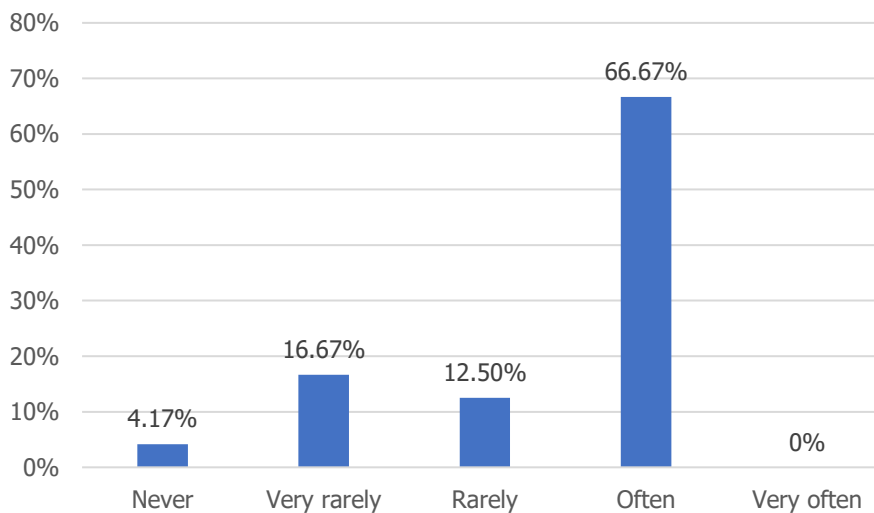
indicated.

Table 2 shows LEAs' authorities' perception on the importance of LEA to partner with LPTK in education partnership. It can be seen that in general 96% to 100% of LEAs in South Sulawesi province agree and strongly agree that LPTK is one of the important partners needed by LEAs and has the capability to assist LEAs in developing and improving the quality of education in their regions.

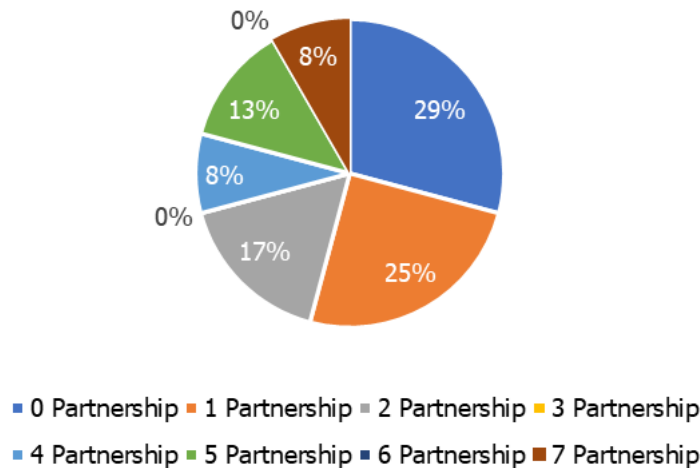
**Table 2.** Perceptions of LEAs on Education Partnership with LPTK

Statement	Agree	Strongly Agree	Combined
LPTK is an important partner for LEA in efforts to develop and improve education in the region.	46%	54%	100%
LPTK has the capability to assist the LEA in developing and improving the quality of education.	50%	50%	100%
LEA needs partnerships with LPTK for the development and improvement of education in the region.	54%	42%	96%

The questionnaire collected data about the frequency and quantity of education partnerships carried out by LEAs and LPTK. Figure 2 shows that 67% of the LEAs in South Sulawesi often carry out education partnerships with LPTK. A total of 33% of LEAs said never, very rarely or rarely. In addition, Figure 3 reveals that the quantity of partnerships that have been established in the last five years varies from 0 or no partnerships to seven partnerships. 29% of LEAs stated that they did not have any partnership, 25% had one, 17% had two partnerships, 13% had five partnerships and 8% had four and seven partnerships, respectively.

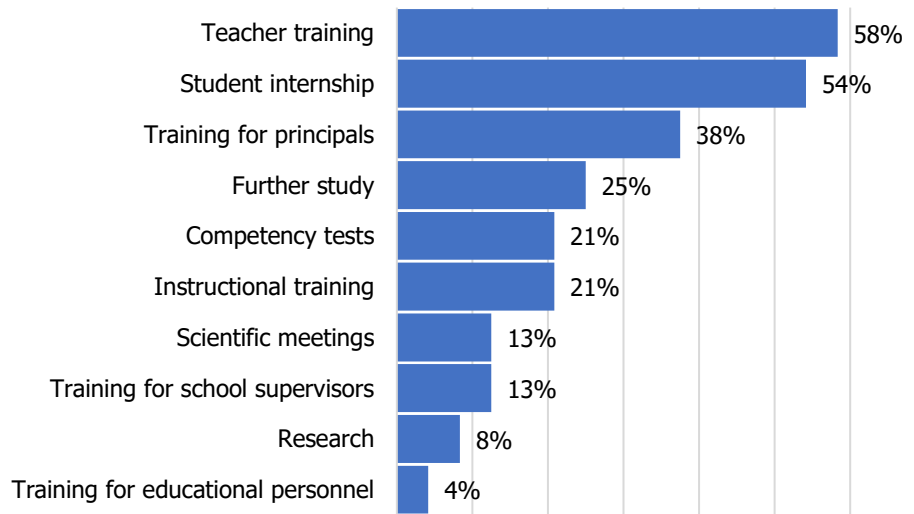


**Figure 2.** Frequency of Education Partnerships between LEAs and LPTK



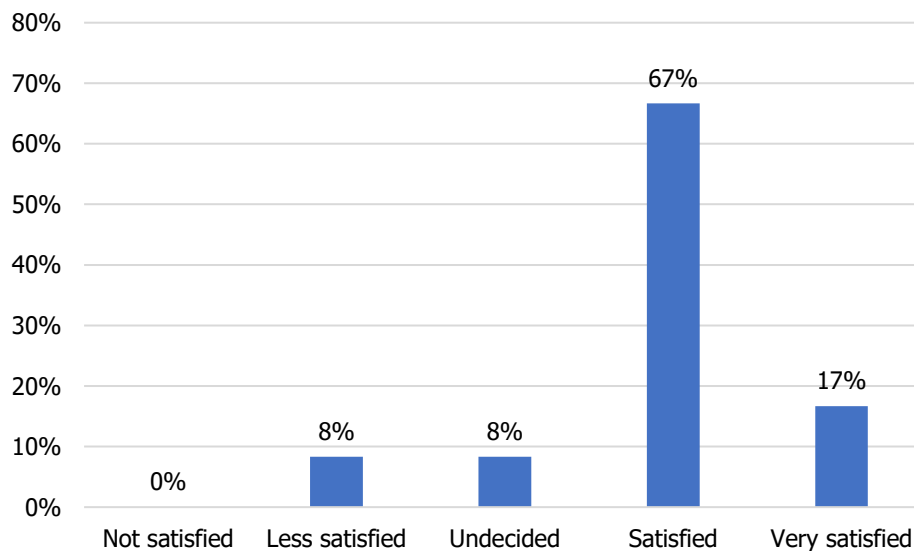
**Figure 3.** Quantity of Education Partnerships between LEAs and LPTKs

Figure 4 shows activities around the education quality development and improvement areas that have been conducted by LEAs in partnership with LPTK. Teacher professional development or training is the most common type of activity conducted in education partnership between the LEAs and LPTK which account for 58%. Student internship activity is the second most common type (54%). Other types of activities such as further studies, scientific/academic meetings (e.g. seminars, conferences etc.) and education research only account for 8% to 25%.



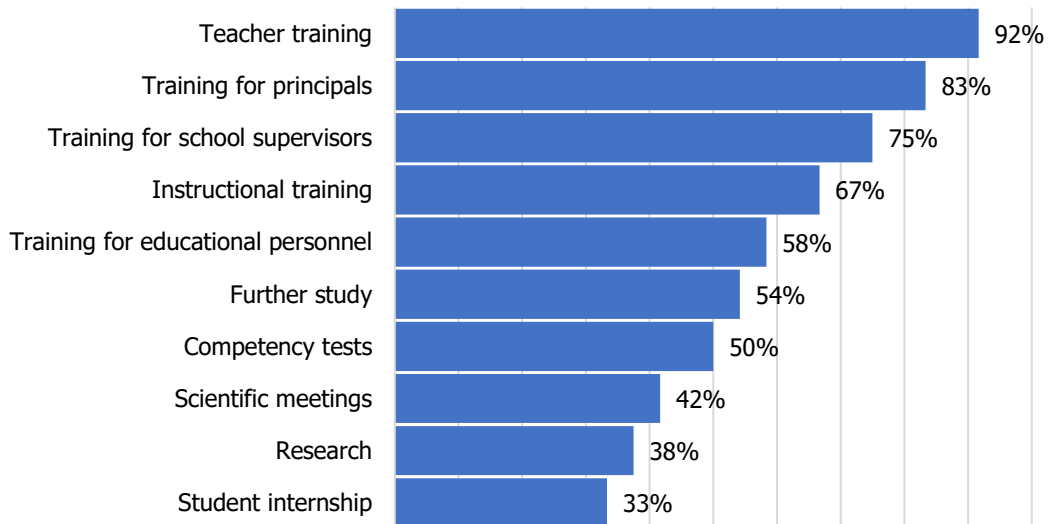
**Figure 4.** Activities Conducted in Education Partnership between LEAs and LPTKs

The satisfaction of LEAs with the education partnership that has been carried out between LEAs and LPTK is important to get the overall picture of the partnerships that have been established. From Figure 5, it can be seen that 67% of LEAs are satisfied with the education partnership carried out with LPTK and another 17% are very satisfied.



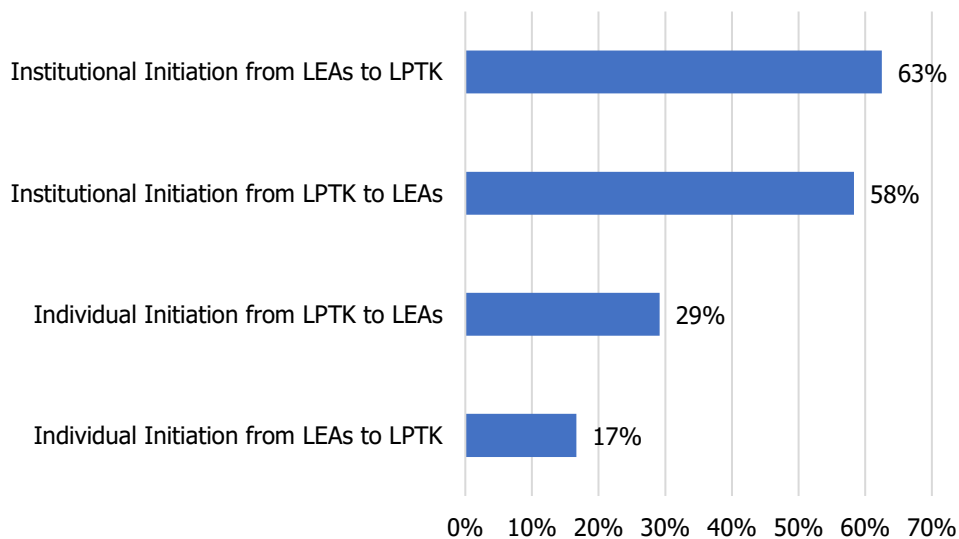
**Figure 5.** Satisfaction of LEAs towards Education Partnership with LPTK

The questionnaire gathers data about the activities in education partnerships needed by LEAs that closely relate to their respective local conditions. Training activities for educators occupy the main needs of LEAs with 92% for teachers, 83% for school principals and 75% for school supervisors. While LEAs' needs in non-training activities such as further studies, competency tests, scientific meetings, research and student internships range from 30% to 50%.



**Figure 6.** Activities Needed in Education Partnership between LEAs and LPTK

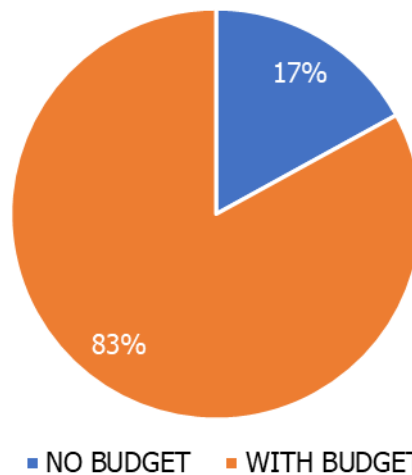
In the questionnaire, respondents were asked how the education partnership between LEAs and LPTK was initiated. Figure 7 shows that, of the four types of initiation, the institutional approach, either initiated by LEAs (63%) or LPTK (58%) is the common approach used in establishing partnership. Education partnerships that are either individually initiated by LEAs LPTK only occur in the range of 17% to 29%.



**Figure 7.** Types of Initiation of Education Partnership

Item in the questionnaire that collects data about problems and obstacles faced by the LEAs in establishing and implementing education partnership with LPTK is in the form of open question. The results show three common problems/obstacles, namely: budget/funding, communication and coordination, and regulation. Figure 8 further clarifies issues related to budgets/funds with a high percentage of LEAs that do not have a partnership budget item in their LEAs' work plan and budget (83%).





**Figure 8.** Availability of Education Partnership Budget

The study reported in this study seeks to provide description of education partnership conducted by LEAs in the province of South Sulawesi and the Makassar State University (UNM) as the oldest and largest LPTK in the region. Three important aspects that need to be seen in understanding this description; reality of the education partnerships that have occurred, activities that exist in the partnership and problems faced in building and conducting partnerships. These three things are investigated in this study based on the perspective or views of authorities overseeing LEAs. In this discussion section, the findings in these three aspects are discussed.

In general, education partnerships between LEAs and education stakeholders are seen as *sine qua non* to improve and develop the quality of education. This is a kind of relationship and cooperation between two or more institutions that collaboratively carry out an activity that will give more value to educational services (Elezi & Ember, 2018). LEAs' education partnerships with educational stakeholders, both from government agencies such as LPMP, LPPKSPS or PPPPTK and other private or independent educational organizations such as educational communities and course institutions reflect the promise of education partnership as a key strategy for education quality improvement. The positive belief of LEAs towards the "strength" of partnerships with education stakeholders is the capital to build and implement educational partnerships.

UNM as an LPTK is believed as one of the prospective stakeholders with capabilities, resources, knowledge and expertise that can assist LEAs to develop and execute educational quality improvement initiatives. This belief is in accordance with the position of LPTK that has lecturers, trainers, experts and researchers with experience, knowledge and skills in various disciplines or fields of study. With all these potentials possessed, LPTK is capable of providing conceptual, technical and practical answers, solutions and innovations to problems and challenges in education. The finding from this study reveals that LEAs have needs and see that LPTK has the capacity to provide assistance or facilitation (Walsh & Backe, 2013). In a more practical sense, education partnership has a potential to enable universities' research-based knowledge be recognized, negotiated and integrated into practices (Burn, et al. 2021).

Education partnership is more likely to bring about changes if partnerships contain activities that relate to actual needs of LEAs. In this study, there exists discrepancy between activities that have been carried out in the education partnership and the actual needs. As shown in Figure 4, teacher training and student internships are the most common types of activities executed in education partnerships. However, LEAs choose different activities when asked about the need based on local conditions of each LEA where professional and instructional training are the main activities needed while student internships is the least needed (Figure 10). These findings are in accordance with Baumfield and Butterworth's (2007) and Walsh and Backe's (2013) highlighting that pre-service teacher education, and continuing professional development are the major activities in education partnership. However, the discrepancy may also indicate a practical problem in the process of establishing partnership where actual needs of parties involved is not properly identified.

It is expected that as LEAs see the importance of partnership and feel more satisfied with it, the frequency and quantity of education partnership will grow more. However, as seen in Figure 2 and 3, the pattern shows otherwise. Only around 70% of LEAs in South Sulawesi province often conduct education partnerships with LPTK and the rest say never, rarely or very rarely. The number of established partnerships also looks unsatisfactory because only a small number of LEAs have an average of one partnership per year. LEAs' positive perception and expectation towards the role and potential of LPTK to assist and facilitate education quality improvement initiatives do not adequately translate into actions in terms of the frequency and quantity of education partnership. Partnership by way of particular universities working with schools and local authorities are still remote and disparate (Mackie, 2020). She further suggested that "there is still work to be done to foster

partnership of a more 'enhanced' nature" (p. 69).

Some issues mentioned earlier may occur due to obstacles or problems faced by either LEAs or LPTK. At LEAs, budgetary constraints are still the main inhibiting factors because the majority of LEAs do not have a partnership budget item/allocation in their budget plan allocations. While availability of funding is an input component that has a significant effect on improving the quality of education (Surayana, 2020). Another obstacle is communication and coordination between LEAs and LPTK. In the current era of decentralization, all education stakeholders have a shared understanding that "education is everyone business", however it often happens that education stakeholders do not have enough and proper communication and interaction that can stimulate and promote informative exchanges leading to the establishment of education partnership.

The process of establishing education partnership is crucial to ensure its effectiveness and one important aspect of this process is partnership initiation. "Who and how" partnerships are initially initiated influencing process of partnership. As shown in Figure 7, the common approach for initiating the partnership is official or institutional, either initiated by LEAs or LPTK and a small number of others through a personal approach/initiation. This finding shows a shift in the pattern of partnership initiation approaches which in the previous decades were mostly initiated and carried out by individuals (Saito et al., 2007). According to Walsh and Backe (2013), partnerships formed up on official or institutional initiations tend to be "bigger" and more complex. It requires sound and ongoing negotiation, planning and commitment from each partner. However, the resulting impact of improvements or changes can be broader, significant, and systemic. In similar vein, Burroughs et al. (2020) contended that partnerships that are institutionalized have better chances to drive changes, though are still not immune from potential obstacles. They further suggested that flexibility is necessary in sustaining partnerships.

## CONCLUSION

Local education authorities (LEA) in general have positive perception and attitude towards the importance and power of education partnership in their efforts to develop and improve education in their regions. Education partnerships between local education authorities (LEA) and universities running education programs (LPTK) have existed and manifested in various education improvement activities. However, poor or non-existent of partnership budget at LEAs is prevalent issue on education partnership which seems to contradict with the devolution of authority and responsibility to the local level. The infrequent and small number of education partnerships may be exacerbated by poor communication and interaction among education stakeholders despite the spirit of making education as "everyone's business". The strongest conclusion as well as recommendation that can be made is that education partnership between LEAs and LPTKs is a promising strategy to leverage education improvement initiatives, but it is undeveloped in the current or existing education partnership. Therefore, both parties (LEAs and LPTK) need to spare substantial time in initiating partnership that allow for more clear, mutual, and collaborative education partnership.

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