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Dynamics of the Implementation of Administrative Law in Public Services: A Qualitative Study on Local Government Agencies

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ABSTRACT

Background: Public services implement government functions and protect citizens' rights, while administrative law provides a framework for lawful and fair administration. **Objective:** This study analyzes the dynamics of administrative law implementation in public services at a local government agency. **Method:** An empirical socio-legal case study drew on management interviews, a supporting employee questionnaire, non-participant observations, and documentation. **Results:** Reported practices generally referred to regulations and standard operating procedures, but gaps remained between procedural compliance and substantive justice. Workload, limited resources, bureaucratic culture, and administrative discretion affected consistency. Communication between officials and service users also emerged as relevant to perceived fairness. **Conclusion:** Effective administrative law implementation requires not only procedural compliance but also accountable discretion, improved staff capacity, rights protection, and clear legal communication. These interpretations are confined to the case described; missing site and data-collection details and unverified questionnaire percentages require author confirmation.

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INTRODUCTION

Public services are one of the main indicators in assessing the quality of government administration and the level of success of the state in realizing community welfare. In the context of the modern state of law, public services are not only seen as administrative activities, but as a concrete embodiment of the state's function in protecting, serving, and fulfilling the rights of citizens. Globally, the demand for effective, transparent, and accountable public services is growing in line with increasing public legal awareness, democratic development, and advances in information technology. Countries in various parts of the world face similar challenges, namely, how to ensure that government administration practices run in accordance with the principles of administrative law that uphold legality, legal certainty, and substantive justice.

From the perspective of global governance, public administration reform is an important agenda to increase public trust in state institutions (Mansoor, 2021). Many

countries modernize their bureaucracy by emphasizing good governance, including strengthening administrative regulations, simplifying procedures, and improving the quality of the state apparatus. However, international reports show that the problems of maladministration, abuse of authority, and low quality of services are still structural problems, especially in developing countries (Lotta et al., 2022). This condition confirms that the existence of good administrative legal rules is not always directly proportional to the effectiveness of their implementation in public service practices.

This problem is also relevant in the context of Indonesia as a legal country that adheres to the principle of the welfare state. Normatively, Indonesia's administrative legal system has undergone significant development through various regulations that regulate governance and public services. The central and regional governments are given broad administrative authority to provide services to the community. However, in practice, the implementation of administrative law at the local government level often faces various obstacles. The public still often complains about slow services, convoluted procedures, lack of transparency, and discriminatory practices. This fact shows that there is a gap between administrative legal norms and the reality of their implementation in the field (Turner et al., 2022).

Specifically, local government agencies have a strategic role because they are at the forefront of direct interaction with the community. Regional autonomy that gives broad authority to local governments should be able to encourage innovation and improve the quality of public services. However, the decentralization of administrative authority also brings its own complexity, especially related to the consistency of the application of administrative law, apparatus capacity, and internal supervision (Setiawan et al., 2022).

In many cases, the problems of public services in the regions are not solely caused by the absence of rules, but by the weak understanding, interpretation, and commitment of the apparatus in implementing the provisions of administrative law in a professional and public interest-oriented manner (Choi et al., 2026; Yusdiansyah, 2023). In the Indonesian legal context, the analysis should distinguish procedural compliance from substantive rights protection. Law No. 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services, Law No. 30 of 2014 concerning Government Administration, and Law No. 37 of 2008 concerning the Ombudsman provide relevant normative points of reference. The applicability of particular provisions and any regional regulations to the actual service studied must be verified against the identified agency and service.

A number of previous studies have examined the relationship between administrative law and public services. The first research shows that the weak enforcement of the principles of legality and accountability in local government administration contributes significantly to the low quality of public services. The study emphasizes that the authorities are often more oriented towards formal procedural aspects than on the objective of equitable service. The second study revealed that maladministration in public services in the regions is influenced by a hierarchical bureaucratic culture and a lack of effective supervision over the use of administrative discretion.

Meanwhile, the third study highlights that the reform of public service regulations has not been fully followed by changes in bureaucratic behavior, so administrative law is often understood as an administrative burden, not as an instrument to protect people's rights. Existing references provide identifiable analytical starting points: Ansori, (2015);

Darumurti, (2014) address governmental discretion; Izzati, (2020) concern oversight and accountability; Johannessen, (2019); Keulemans & Groeneveld, (2020) address frontline discretion. These works should not be represented as the unnamed “first”, “second”, and “third” studies without verification that their specific findings correspond to those descriptions.

Although these studies make important contributions, most studies still place administrative law in a normative or evaluative framework in general. Relatively few studies have explored in depth the dynamics of the implementation of administrative law in public service practice through a qualitative approach, especially by examining the experiences of bureaucratic and community actors directly (Chang & Brewer, 2023). In fact, the qualitative approach allows researchers to understand the empirical reality, meaning, and socio-legal context behind administrative behavior in local government agencies.

The urgency of this research is getting stronger, considering the increasing public demands for responsive and fair public services. Dissatisfaction with public services not only has an impact on low public trust in local governments, but also has the potential to cause legal conflicts, administrative complaints, and even disputes in the state administrative court (Halling & Baekgaard, 2024; Madsen et al., 2022). Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of how administrative law is implemented, interpreted, and internalized by local government apparatus in the context of daily public services.

The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the dynamics of the implementation of administrative law, which is studied qualitatively and contextually. This research not only assesses the conformity of public service practices with applicable legal norms, but also explores non-normative factors such as organizational culture, understanding of the law of the apparatus, power relations, and interaction between the bureaucracy and the community.

Thus, this research offers a more holistic perspective in understanding public service problems at the local government level. The specific contribution of this case is the joint interpretation of management accounts, employee perceptions, and observed service interactions to distinguish formal adherence to administrative procedures from substantive rights protection. This is a contextual contribution rather than a claim of entirely unprecedented subject matter; stronger novelty claims require a verifiable comparison with the cited literature.

The main purpose of this research is to analyze in depth how administrative law is implemented in public service practices in local government agencies. In particular, this study aims to identify the forms of dynamics, obstacles, and strategies used by the apparatus in applying the principles of administrative law. In addition, this research also aims to understand the perception and experience of the public as service recipients towards the implementation of administrative law in public services.

The benefits of this research are expected to be felt theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this research contributes to the development of the study of state administrative law, especially in empirical and sociological contexts. The findings of this study can enrich the legal literature with a qualitative approach that emphasizes the reality of law implementation. Practically, the results of this research are expected to be evaluation materials for local governments in improving the quality of public services and increasing the compliance of the apparatus with the principles of administrative law.

The implications of this research are not only limited to the academic level, but also to public policy. The findings of the research can be the basis for recommendations for the formulation of public service policies that are more responsive, transparent, and oriented towards the protection of people's rights. In addition, this research is expected to encourage the strengthening of the capacity of the local government apparatus through increasing understanding and internalization of administrative legal values in public service practices, so that the goal of a just and community-oriented state of law can be realized in real terms.

METHOD

Research Type and Design

This study uses a qualitative approach with the characteristics of empirical legal research (socio-legal research). The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to understand in depth the dynamics of the implementation of administrative law in public service practice, which cannot be measured only through quantitative data. The main focus of this research is on the meaning, process, and experience of the research subjects in applying administrative law norms in local government agencies.

The research design used is a qualitative case study, which allows researchers to examine legal phenomena contextually and in-depth in one or more local government agencies. The case study is considered relevant because the implementation of administrative law in public services is greatly influenced by the institutional context, bureaucratic culture, and interaction between government officials and the community. With this design, the research seeks to describe the empirical reality of the implementation of administrative law as it occurs in the field, not just as regulated in laws and regulations.

Location and Research Subject

This research is carried out in local government agencies that have direct authority in the implementation of public services to the community. The selection of the research location was carried out purposively, taking into consideration that the agency represents a work unit that intensively interacts with the community and applies the authority of state administration in daily practice.

The research subjects consisted of two main groups. First, the local government apparatus, which includes structural officials and technical implementers of public services, who have a role in administrative decision-making and the implementation of service procedures. Second, the public as users of public services, which is selected based on direct experience in accessing services in the agencies studied. The determination of the research subject was carried out by purposive sampling, with certain criteria, such as direct involvement in the public service process and the ability to provide information relevant to the focus of the research.

Research Instruments

In qualitative research, researchers play the role of the main instrument that is directly involved in the process of data collection and analysis. The role of the researcher includes research planning, data mining in the field, interpretation of findings, and drawing conclusions. To support this role, several supporting instruments are used to improve the systematics and accuracy of data collection.

The supporting instruments used include semi-structured interview guidelines, which are compiled based on research focusing on the implementation of administrative law in public services. In addition, observation sheets are used to record behaviors, procedures, and public service situations that are directly observed. This research also utilizes official documents as supporting instruments, such as internal agency regulations, standard operating procedures (SOPs), and public complaint documents relevant to the research topic. The supporting employee questionnaire concerned perceptions of SOP clarity, procedural consistency, justice, and protection of citizens' rights. Its exact wording, response scale, administration procedure, and scoring rules were not supplied and must be reported before quantitative summaries can be validated.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection in this study was carried out through several complementary techniques to obtain comprehensive and in-depth data.

First, in-depth interviews are conducted with local government officials and the community using the service. This interview aims to explore the views, experiences, and understanding of the research subjects related to the implementation of administrative law in public services. Semi-structured interview techniques are used so that the researcher has clear guidelines, but still provides space for the informant to convey their experiences and perspectives freely.

Second, direct observation was carried out on the public service process in the local government agency where the research was located. This observation is focused on service procedures, interaction between the apparatus and the community, and the application of administrative law principles such as legality, transparency, and accountability. Observation is carried out in a non-participatory manner, so that the researcher is not directly involved in the service process, but plays the role of an observer.

Third, the documentation study was carried out by examining various documents related to the implementation of public services and the implementation of administrative law. The document includes laws and regulations, internal policies of the agency, standard operating procedures, and other relevant supporting documents. This documentation study serves to strengthen the data from interviews and observations, as well as the basis for normative analysis of the public service practices studied.

Through the combination of these data collection techniques, this research is expected to be able to produce a complete and in-depth picture of the dynamics of the implementation of administrative laws in public services in local government agencies. Data analysis: Interview and observation findings are presented as a qualitative interpretation of procedural adherence, administrative discretion, workload constraints, legal communication, and perceived fairness. Documentary materials serve as a normative comparison with the service practices described. The submitted manuscript does not specify a coding protocol,

triangulation procedure, or audit trail; these steps cannot be claimed as completed without confirmation from the author.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Description of Respondents

This study involved several groups of respondents who were purposively selected to represent the main actors in the implementation of administrative law in public services in local government agencies. Respondents consist of elements of agency management, licensed employees who are directly involved in public services, and service user communities.

In general, the local government officials who are respondents have diverse educational backgrounds and working periods. This variation provides a relatively comprehensive picture of the level of understanding and experience of the apparatus in applying administrative law. Meanwhile, respondents from community elements were selected based on their direct experience in accessing public services in the agencies studied.

Table 1. General Characteristics of Respondents

Respondent Group	Quantity	Main Criteria
Agency Management	5 people	Structural and decision-making offices
Licensed Employees	15 people	Direct service officer
Service User Community	20 people	Have accessed the service at least 2 times

The table shows that this research not only focuses on the bureaucratic point of view, but also involves the community as a legal subject who receives the direct impact of the implementation of administrative law. The reported participant composition comprises five management informants, fifteen employees, and twenty service users (forty individuals in total). However, the manuscript does not provide disaggregated interview findings or quotations from the twenty service users. Their reported experiences therefore cannot be reconstructed or attributed to individual participants.

Key Findings from the Interview with Management

The results of in-depth interviews with the management of local government agencies show that normatively, the implementation of administrative laws in public services has referred to applicable laws and regulations and standard operating procedures (SOPs). The informants stated that the principles of legality, accountability, and legal certainty have become the formal basis for the implementation of services.

However, the research findings also reveal a gap between norms and practices. Some officials acknowledge that administrative pressure, limited human resources, and high workloads often affect the consistency of administrative law enforcement. Under certain conditions, the apparatus uses administrative discretion to speed up services, even though it has the potential to cause procedural inconsistencies (Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022).

In addition, the management also highlighted the limited understanding of the apparatus of administrative law. Administrative law tends to be understood as a procedural obligation, not as an instrument for the protection of people's rights. These findings show that the dynamics of the implementation of administrative laws are greatly influenced by structural and cultural factors in the local government bureaucracy.

Findings from the Licensed Employee Questionnaire

To complete the interview data, this study used a questionnaire limited to licensed employees who are directly involved in public service. This questionnaire aims to map the perception of the apparatus towards the application of administrative law principles in daily practice.

The results of the questionnaire showed that most of the respondents stated that they had understood the service procedures technically. However, the understanding of substantive administrative legal principles, such as the principle of prudence and the protection of citizens' rights, still varies.

Table 2. Employee Perception of the Implementation of Administrative Law

Aspects Assessed	Percentage Agree
The SOPs are clear and easy to understand	86%
Consistent service procedures	68%
The principle of justice applied	61%
Optimal protection of people's rights	57%

These findings indicate that although administrative tools are available, the implementation of administrative law ideally still faces challenges, especially in ensuring justice and the protection of people's rights. Accordingly, Table 2 should be interpreted cautiously as an unverified descriptive summary rather than a validated estimate of agreement. The substantive contrast reported by the authors greater procedural clarity than perceived justice and rights protection remains a tentative interpretation until the original questionnaire data are checked.

Direct observation of the public service process shows that there are variations in the implementation of administrative procedures. During normal service hours, procedures tend to run according to SOPs. However, in certain conditions, such as a surge in the number of service requesters, the apparatus tends to simplify administrative stages for the sake of time efficiency (Edri-Peer & Cohen, 2025).

The results of the observation also show that the interaction between the apparatus and the community greatly affects the public's perception of administrative justice. Communicative and informative services are considered fairer by the community, even though the procedures are relatively the same. On the contrary, the lack of legal explanation to the public often leads to misunderstandings and dissatisfaction (Döring & Madsen, 2022).

The findings of this observation confirm that the implementation of administrative law does not only depend on written rules, but also on communication practices and service ethics of local government officials. Although the narrative discusses how public-facing explanations influence perceived fairness, the manuscript does not provide interview

excerpts, observation logs, or separately analyzed responses from service users. This observation is therefore retained as a reported qualitative interpretation, not presented as a measured causal effect.

Table 3. Levels of Employee Perception of the Application of Administrative Law Principles

Principles of Administrative Law	Positive Perception Level
Legality	Height
Accountability	Medium
Legal Certainty	Medium
Substantive Justice	Low–Medium

The graph shows that the principle of relative legality has been well implemented, while the principle of substantive justice still needs to be strengthened in public service practices. Table 3 presents qualitative categories rather than measured scores. Its labels ("Height", "Medium", and "Low–Medium") lack an operational definition and should not be read as independently validated levels. The original labels are retained pending clarification of their assessment criteria.

Overall, the results of the study show that the implementation of administrative law in public services in local government agencies is dynamic and contextual. There is normative conformity with applicable regulations, but in practice, there are still various structural, cultural, and technical obstacles. This dynamic emphasizes that the effectiveness of administrative law is not only determined by the quality of regulations, but also by the capacity of the apparatus, organizational culture, and the quality of interaction with the community as a legal subject.

DISCUSSION

Interview Data and Interpretation of Interview Results

The results of in-depth interviews with the management of local government agencies show that the formal implementation of administrative laws in public services refers to applicable laws and regulations and standard operating procedures (SOPs). The informants stated that the principles of legality and legal certainty are the main basis of every administrative decision-making process. However, further interpretation of the interview data reveals that this understanding is still normative and procedural.

In practice, the apparatus tends to place administrative law as an instrument of internal work control, not as a mechanism to protect people's rights. Administrative discretion is often used to adjust services to field conditions, such as time and human resource limitations. Although such discretion is intended to increase efficiency, its use has not always been balanced with considerations of accountability and substantive justice.

These findings show that there is a tension between the demands of bureaucratic efficiency and the ideal principles of administrative law in public services (Mikkelsen et al., 2024). For legal interpretation, administrative discretion should be assessed in relation to its lawful purpose, accountability, and the general principles of good governance (AUPB) under Law No. 30 of 2014. Faster service alone is not sufficient evidence that a discretionary

departure from standard procedures is legally justified; the factual basis and applicable authority would need to be established.

Discussion of Licensed Employee Questionnaire Results

The results of the questionnaire filled out by licensed employees provide an overview of the internal perception of the apparatus towards the implementation of administrative laws. In general, respondents considered that the service SOP was quite clear and easy to understand. This indicates that structurally, the administrative tools are in place and serve as work guidelines.

However, lower levels of consent on the aspects of justice and protection of people's rights indicate a gap between technical understanding and substantive understanding of administrative law. The apparatus focuses more on completing administrative tasks according to procedures rather than on the legal and social impact of the service decisions taken. This discussion emphasizes that the success of the implementation of administrative law is not only determined by the clarity of SOPs, but also by the internalization of legal values in the work culture of the local government apparatus (Bell & Smith, 2022).

Analysis of Observation Results

Direct observation of the public service process reinforced the findings from interviews and questionnaires. In normal service situations, the apparatus tends to follow administrative procedures according to the provisions. However, in certain conditions, such as the high volume of service applicants, there is a simplification of administrative stages that are not always formally documented.

The analysis of the observation results shows that public service practices are greatly influenced by contextual situations and interpersonal interactions between the apparatus and the community. An apparatus that is able to provide legal explanations communicatively tends to create a perception of fair service, even though the procedures applied are the same (Hassan et al., 2023). On the contrary, the lack of transparency and communication of the law often leads to public dissatisfaction, which is then interpreted as a form of administrative injustice. This confirms that administrative law in the public service does not only operate through legal texts, but also through everyday social practices.

Comparison with Previous Research

The findings of this study are in line with a number of previous studies that stated that the main problem in public services does not lie in the absence of regulations, but in weak implementation and supervision. Previous research has also shown that a hierarchical bureaucratic culture and procedural orientation are factors that hinder the application of the principles of justice and accountability in public services.

However, this study expands on previous findings by emphasizing aspects of local dynamics and contexts in the implementation of administrative laws at the local government level. In contrast to normative or macro-evaluative studies, this study shows that administrative law practices are greatly influenced by micro factors, such as apparatus perception, work pressure, and communication patterns with the public. Thus, this research

makes a more in-depth empirical contribution to the study of administrative law in the context of public services.

This interpretation can be situated alongside scholarship already listed in the manuscript: Ansori, (2015) discusses discretion and government responsibility; Johannessen, (2019) considers negotiated frontline discretion; Keulemans & Groeneveld, (2020) examine supervisory influences on frontline discretion; and Izzati, (2020) addresses Ombudsman oversight. The present manuscript adds a case-specific account of workload and communication, but the absence of a fully identified setting and user testimony limits the strength of any comparative inference.

Practical Implications

Based on the discussion of the research results, there are several practical implications that can be formulated. First, it is necessary to increase the capacity of the local government apparatus not only in the technical aspect of services, but also in the substantive understanding of administrative law. Apparatus training should emphasize the values of justice, accountability, and protection of community rights as the main goals of public services.

Second, local government agencies need to strengthen internal supervision mechanisms for the use of administrative discretion (Overman et al., 2021). Discretion should be positioned as a responsible legal instrument, not as a pragmatic solution that has the potential to obscure the principle of legal certainty. Third, improving the quality of legal communication between the apparatus and the community is an important aspect in realizing fair public services. Transparency of information and clear explanations of legal procedures can increase public trust in local government agencies (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2021).

Research Limitations

This research has several limitations that need to be observed. First, this research was conducted in the context of one local government agency, so that the results of the research could not be widely generalized to all government agencies in Indonesia. Second, the use of questionnaires in this qualitative research is supportive, so that the data produced emphasizes more on respondents' perceptions, not on quantitative measurements that are general.

Third, the limited research time limits the depth of observation on the variation in public service situations in the long term. Therefore, further research is recommended to use a longitudinal approach or compare several local government agencies to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the implementation of administrative law in public services. Further limitations concern the absence of the agency identity, fieldwork period, verbatim quotations, complete service-user findings, and the original questionnaire response data. These are reporting and evidence gaps requiring author verification rather than issues that can be resolved through editorial rewriting alone.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the implementation of administrative law in local government public services and identified a gap between formal procedural compliance and substantive justice. Existing regulations and standard operating procedures provide a formal basis for legality, legal certainty, and accountability. However, administrative practices remain affected by workload, limited resources, bureaucratic culture, and the use of discretion.

The findings suggest that officials often emphasize technical procedures while protection of citizens' rights receives less attention. Interviews, employee perceptions, and service observations also indicate the importance of clear legal communication in shaping perceptions of fairness. These results imply a need to strengthen substantive legal understanding, accountable discretion, internal supervision, and transparent service communication. Because the service setting and some supporting data remain insufficiently documented, the conclusions should be interpreted cautiously within this case.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no commercial, financial, or personal relationships that could be construed as potential conflicts of interest in the conduct, analysis, interpretation, or publication of this research.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The authors contributed to the development of this study, which examines the implementation of administrative law in public services within local government agencies. The research activities encompassed conceptualization, research methodology, data collection through interviews, questionnaires, observations, and documentation, data analysis, interpretation of findings, manuscript preparation, and critical revision. The specific contributions of each author should be confirmed before publication. All authors are responsible for reviewing and approving the final version of the manuscript and ensuring the integrity and accuracy of the research.

GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

The authors acknowledge the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools to assist in improving the linguistic clarity, grammatical accuracy, and academic presentation of this manuscript. The use of generative AI was limited to supporting the writing and editorial refinement processes and did not replace the authors' intellectual contributions, research analysis, or interpretation of findings.

All AI-assisted content was subject to author review and verification to ensure accuracy, originality, and compliance with academic integrity and publication ethics. The authors assume full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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