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PROFESSIONALISM OF CIVIL SERVANTS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN INDONESIA

Ganta Pratama[1], Cholidah Utama[2]

[1,2]Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, Indonesia

Corresponding author: gantapratama27@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Professionalism in the civil service is essential to ensure justice, accountability, and ethical governance within Indonesia's administrative system. This study examines how professionalism serves as a bridge between law and ethics in the implementation of administrative law. The main objective is to explore civil servants' perceptions, practices, and institutional challenges in applying administrative law through professional conduct. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study method, data were collected through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and direct observation in selected government institutions. The findings reveal four key themes: the perception of professionalism as moral and legal responsibility, institutional barriers such as bureaucratic hierarchy and weak supervision, ethical and legal integration, and improved governance outcomes marked by higher accountability and reduced maladministration. The results demonstrate that professionalism mediates ethical behavior and legal compliance, reinforcing transparency and justice in public administration. This study contributes to refining *Good Governance Theory* and provides practical insights for developing professional, ethical, and accountable bureaucratic systems in Indonesia.

Keywords: administrative law, ethics, governance, professionalism, public administration.

INTRODUCTION

Professionalism among civil servants constitutes the cornerstone of administrative justice and accountability within public institutions. In the realm of administrative law, professionalism transcends mere technical competence; it embodies ethical conduct, responsibility, integrity, transparency, and a steadfast commitment to serving the public interest. Within this framework, civil servants are expected to act in accordance with the principles of legality, proportionality, and accountabilityprinciples that collectively serve as the backbone of just and effective administrative governance (Septian, 2021).

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A professional bureaucracy is a precondition for the effective implementation of administrative law. When civil servants fail to uphold professional standards, the likelihood of maladministration, such as unlawful decisions, delays in service delivery, and abuse of authority, inevitably increases. Empirical studies indicate that Indonesia continues to face significant challenges related to bureaucratic integrity and institutional accountability, undermining the application of core administrative law principles (Utami, 2022; Dwimawanti, 2024). This context underscores the pressing need to promote professionalism as both a moral and institutional foundation for strengthening the administrative justice system.

The urgency of this topic has intensified amid ongoing public sector reforms and the growing societal demand for accountable, responsive, and efficient governance. As Dwimawanti (2024) observes, low managerial commitment and entrenched bureaucratic culture remain the primary barriers to enhancing professionalism in public institutions. Consequently, fostering bureaucratic professionalism is no longer an aspirational ideal but an indispensable strategy for achieving transparent and equitable public administration.

From a global governance perspective, professionalism has also become a key determinant of institutional resilience in adapting to the complex demands of modern administration. The emergence of new public management valuesemphasizing competence, innovation, and service orientationhas compelled civil servants to adopt a mindset aligned with global professional norms (Septian, 2021). In the Indonesian context, this transformation requires not only structural reform but also a cultural and ethical shift toward strengthening bureaucratic professionalism as a governance norm.

However, the implementation of administrative law in Indonesia continues to face deep-rooted challenges, notably maladministration, abuse of power, and weak bureaucratic integrity. Maladministration occurs when administrative actions deviate from legal norms or violate the principles of good governance, often resulting in public grievances. Utami (2022) highlights that the mismatch between civil servants' competencies and their assigned roles significantly diminishes the quality of public service. Similarly, the persistent abuse of authority reflects a deficiency in institutional accountability (Dwimawanti, 2024), while weak integrity, compounded by an underdeveloped merit system and bureaucratic patronage, hampers professional and lawful conduct in the civil service.

These challenges reveal a clear disjunction between the normative framework of administrative lawwhich emphasizes legality, proportionality, and accountabilityand the behavioral realities within public institutions. Despite the legal requirement that administrative decisions be lawful, proportionate, and accountable, in practice, decisions are often delayed, opaque, or influenced by nonlegal considerations such as political or personal interests (Utami, 2022). This discrepancy suggests that the effective realization of administrative law depends not solely on regulatory frameworks but also on the internalization of professionalism among civil servants.

Scholarly literature further indicates that empirical research directly linking civil service professionalism with the implementation of administrative law in Indonesia remains limited. Most studies have focused on structural or managerial reform without exploring how civil servants' perceptions and practices of professionalism shape the enforcement of administrative law principles (Septian, 2021). This gap underscores the necessity for a qualitative inquiry that captures the lived experiences, institutional constraints, and ethical considerations underpinning professional conduct in public administration.

In response to this gap, the present study "Professionalism of Civil Servants in the Implementation of Administrative Law: A Qualitative Study of Government Institutions in Indonesia" seeks to explore how civil servants perceive and practice professionalism in implementing administrative law. It also aims to identify institutional and individual factors

that influence or hinder professional behavior and to propose a qualitative model of professionalismbased administrative governance suitable for the Indonesian context.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the broader discourse on good governance and professional ethics by integrating these two frameworks within the domain of administrative law. It argues that professionalism serves as the mediating mechanism through which legal norms are translated into bureaucratic practices that uphold justice and accountability. Practically, the study provides actionable insights and recommendations for policymakers, administrative leaders, and reform advocates to enhance bureaucratic professionalism and ensure that administrative law is implemented fairly, effectively, and transparently.

From a policy standpoint, the findings of this study are expected to inform ongoing public sector reformsparticularly in civil service management, administrative justice, and public service lawby introducing a model of professionalism that is contextually grounded and institutionally feasible. Ultimately, this research aspires not only to enrich academic debates on public administration and administrative law but also to offer an empirical foundation for transformative governance in Indonesia's public sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professionalism within the civil service is a central theme in administrative reform and governance quality across various Indonesian contexts. Brumadyadisty (2025) emphasizes that implementing the BerAKHLAK core values significantly enhances civil servants' professionalism by reinforcing ethical behavior, accountability, and service orientation in East Java's bureaucratic system. Similarly, Natika and Septianti (2023) reveal that inadequate supervision, limited expertise, and a nonconducive work environment impede professional growth among civil servants, calling for continuous training and leadership development. Arifin, Dadang, and Murni (2024) highlight that professionalism must also incorporate technological adaptability and responsiveness to public needs, positioning the civil service as a dynamic public servant institution. Triono (2022) argues that law enforcement against ethical violations within public service delivery is fundamental to restoring public trust and achieving good governance. Meanwhile, Mudhoffar, Frinaldi, and Roberia (2024) contend that professionalism serves as the foundation for the effective implementation of administrative law principles, particularly transparency, proportionality, and accountability, which remain inconsistently applied across different levels of government.

Nurmiyati et al. (2025) further examine the ethical dimensions of professionalism through the BerAKHLAK framework, demonstrating that values such as competence, harmony, and loyalty strengthen governance ethics and legal compliance. Podungge, Ilato, and Putri (2025) highlight that inconsistencies in disciplinary enforcement and administrative decisionmaking undermine professionalism and institutional integrity. Prasetyo (2022) observes that bureaucratic professionalization in Indonesia suffers from a halfhearted commitment to functional positions and the persistence of hierarchical power structures, weakening the merit system. Rumbewas and Wijiningsih (2025) focus on accountability in disciplinary processes, underscoring the necessity of lawful and fair enforcement to sustain administrative professionalism. Al Hafis (2017) conceptualizes professionalism as a key indicator of bureaucratic effectiveness, emphasizing empowerment, adaptability, and simplified procedures to enhance public sector performance. Suri, Darmawi, and Gaevan (2022) reinforce this by identifying commitment, infrastructure, and information technology as core determinants of civil service professionalism within ideal public service concepts.

Pekey et al. (2024) argue that the effective implementation of the Komisi Aparatur Sipil Negara (KASN) recommendations strengthens meritocracy and professionalism within administrative law enforcement. Suma (2025) employs a phenomenological approach to reveal how moral integrity, responsibility, and adaptability define professional identity among civil

servants, though political intervention remains a major barrier. Ramli and Syam (2006) link professional behavior in public service directly to administrative law compliance, emphasizing legal obedience and ethical codes as drivers of public trust. Musrya, Baharuddin, and Said (2020) examine the enforcement of Government Regulation No. 53/2010, showing that disciplinary implementation is often weak due to inadequate supervision and organizational culture. Collectively, these studies indicate that while professionalism, ethics, and legal compliance are widely discussed, empirical integration between professional conduct and administrative law implementation remains underexplored. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by qualitatively examining how professionalism among civil servants operationalizes the principles of Administrative Law in Indonesian government institutions.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design embedded within a case study approach. The qualitative descriptive method was selected because it allows for a comprehensive exploration of contextual realities and the meanings that civil servants attach to professionalism in implementing administrative law. Unlike quantitative approaches that emphasize numerical generalization, the qualitative approach prioritizes interpretive understanding and contextual depth (Greene, 2014). This design provides flexibility for investigating complex social and organizational phenomena where multiple variables interact dynamically. The case study approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to analyze the phenomenon of professionalism in reallife administrative environments. It provides an opportunity to understand the relationship between theoretical principles of administrative law and practical bureaucratic realities (Yin, 2018).

A descriptive orientation was maintained throughout the research to ensure that the data presented reflects real experiences rather than predetermined theoretical constructs. The study seeks to describe how professionalism is perceived and practiced rather than to test hypotheses or establish causality. Descriptive qualitative research provides a detailed portrayal of natural phenomena as they occur in everyday administrative life (Sandelowski, 2000). This orientation aligns with the purpose of the research, which is to interpret meanings, experiences, and institutional factors influencing the professional conduct of civil servants. The descriptive element is critical in providing an empirically grounded understanding of professional ethics and administrative accountability. The combination of qualitative and case study elements strengthens the study's interpretive rigor and contextual validity (Oxford Research Encyclopedia, 2023).

The research was conducted in selected government institutions at both the central and regional levels in Indonesia. These sites were chosen to represent a range of administrative contexts, from ministries to provincial and district offices. The institutions were selected purposively based on their involvement in administrative law enforcement, public service management, and bureaucratic ethics. This selection strategy ensures that the study captures variations across institutional hierarchies and geographic regions. It also allows for the comparison of how professionalism is understood and enacted at different levels of government. Such purposive selection aligns with qualitative sampling principles that emphasize information richness over representativeness (Patton, 2002).

Participants in this study included senior officials, midlevel civil servants, legal officers, and members of ethics committees. These informants were selected using purposive sampling based on their expertise and involvement in administrative decisionmaking. To qualify for participation, individuals were required to have at least three years of experience in their current positions and familiarity with the application of administrative law. The use of purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of key actors capable of providing rich and relevant data about the research topic. Sampling continued until the point of theoretical saturation, when no new

themes emerged from the interviews. This approach aligns with qualitative research standards emphasizing depth and meaning over numerical adequacy (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

Data collection involved three main techniques: indepth interviews, document analysis, and direct observation. Semistructured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of professionalism and legal accountability. Each interview lasted between 45 and 90 minutes and was recorded with the participants' consent to ensure accuracy and depth. Document analysis included reviewing institutional reports, ethics codes, performance evaluations, and relevant regulatory frameworks. These documents provided secondary evidence that complemented and validated the interview findings. Observations were made during administrative meetings and decisionmaking processes to capture professional behavior in context.

The integration of these three methods ensured methodological triangulation, enhancing the validity and credibility of findings. Triangulation allows for crossverification between different data sources to ensure consistency and accuracy in the interpretation of results (Patton, 2002). The field observations were particularly useful in revealing implicit aspects of professional conduct that participants might not articulate during interviews. Document analysis, meanwhile, allowed for the examination of formal structures and policies governing professionalism. Interviews contributed to understanding how civil servants internalize and practice those formal expectations in everyday decisionmaking. Together, these methods created a comprehensive dataset for thematic interpretation.

Data analysis followed the Miles and Huberman (2014) framework of qualitative data analysis, which involves three concurrent stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. In the data reduction phase, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded and categorized according to emerging themes. Data display involved organizing and visualizing information in matrices and charts to facilitate pattern recognition and thematic synthesis. The conclusion drawing phase entailed identifying recurring patterns, relationships, and explanatory insights that captured the essence of professionalism within bureaucratic practice. The analysis was iterative, with continuous refinement of codes and categories as new data were collected. This process ensured that the final themes were well grounded in the empirical evidence.

To maintain analytic rigor, the study applied thematic analysis to identify core patterns of meaning related to professionalism, accountability, and ethical decisionmaking. Coding was conducted manually using both open and axial coding techniques to capture nuances in participants' narratives. The emergent themes were constantly compared across data sources to identify similarities and variations. Data interpretation was conducted interpretively rather than statistically, focusing on meaning construction rather than measurement. The ultimate goal was to construct a qualitative model illustrating the relationship between professionalism and administrative law implementation. The analytical framework was continuously refined through iterative engagement with the data and literature (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

Credibility and trustworthiness were ensured through triangulation, member checking, and the maintenance of an audit trail. Triangulation was achieved through multiple data sources, methods, and perspectives to validate the findings. Member checking involved presenting preliminary interpretations to selected participants to verify accuracy and authenticity. The audit trail documented all analytic decisions and data transformations, ensuring transparency and replicability. Dependability was achieved by maintaining detailed field notes and methodological memos. Confirmability was enhanced by reflexive journaling, where the researcher documented biases and assumptions throughout the research process. These strategies collectively contributed to the study's methodological integrity.

Ethical considerations were given paramount importance throughout the research process. Participants were informed of the study's purpose and provided written consent prior

to participation. Their identities were kept confidential, and pseudonyms were used in reporting to ensure anonymity. Institutional permissions were obtained from all participating organizations before data collection commenced. Sensitive data, such as internal documents and recorded interviews, were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. The study adhered to ethical principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and nonmaleficence, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and institutional integrity.

The study also incorporated reflexivity to address potential researcher bias and positionality. As the research involved hierarchical government institutions, the researcher maintained awareness of power dynamics that might influence participant responses. Reflexive notes were kept to document the researcher's interpretations and interactions during data collection. These notes helped distinguish between observed behavior and subjective impressions. Reflexivity also ensured that the analysis remained focused on participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's preconceptions. This ongoing selfawareness contributed to the credibility and neutrality of the research findings (Sandelowski, 2000).

The data collection process spanned a period of six months, covering both central and regional government sites. Each phaseinterviewing, document analysis, and observationwas conducted sequentially to allow iterative refinement of focus areas. Preliminary findings from earlier phases informed the subsequent rounds of data collection. This cyclical process of collection and analysis strengthened the coherence and depth of thematic insights. Temporal variation also enabled the observation of changes in bureaucratic behavior over time. This temporal dimension added robustness to the qualitative description of professionalism in administrative contexts.

Operational definitions were developed to ensure conceptual clarity and consistency in data interpretation. "Professionalism" was defined as the integration of competence, ethics, and accountability in bureaucratic practice. "Administrative law implementation" referred to the application of legal norms and procedural fairness in decisionmaking processes. "Accountability" denoted the obligation of civil servants to justify decisions and actions in accordance with established regulations. These definitions were refined during the research process to reflect the meanings articulated by participants. The operationalization of these key concepts ensured alignment between empirical data and theoretical constructs. This process enhanced the validity and interpretive precision of the study's findings.

Finally, the overall methodological framework of this study ensures that the research outcomes are credible, contextually grounded, and theoretically meaningful. By combining a qualitative descriptive design with a case study method, the research captures both the depth and complexity of bureaucratic professionalism. The integration of multiple data sources strengthens the reliability of interpretations while maintaining sensitivity to contextual nuances. The iterative analytic approach ensures that emerging insights are empirically supported and theoretically coherent. Ethical and reflexive practices safeguard participant welfare and research integrity. Ultimately, this methodological design provides a robust foundation for understanding how civil servants in Indonesia embody professionalism in implementing administrative law.

RESULTS

Table 1. The results reveal four primary themes

Theme	Description	Key Indicators	Supporting Evidence (Field Data)	Interpretation and Discussion
Perception of Professionalism	Civil servants perceive	Duty ethics, obedience to	Participants emphasized	This finding shows that professionalism

Theme	Description	Key Indicators	Supporting Evidence (Field Data)	Interpretation and Discussion
	professionalism as a blend of moral responsibility, legal compliance, and devotion to public service guided by ethical values.	administrative law, commitment to service quality.	that professionalism is "not only about competence but also moral integrity and fairness in decision-making."	in the public sector is not merely a technical construct but an ethical-moral framework. Respondents link professionalism with integrity and fairness, suggesting a strong normative dimension. This perception aligns with public administration theories emphasizing *ethical governance* and moral accountability.
Institutional Barriers	Bureaucratic structures and hierarchical cultures limit the autonomy and innovative capacity of civil servants.	Rigid hierarchy, weak internal control, lack of merit-based promotion.	Mid-level officers noted that "superiors often dominate administrative decisions, leaving little room for discretion or accountability."	Institutional rigidity appears as a systemic barrier to professional growth. The dominance of senior officials discourages initiative and critical thinking, reflecting a culture of compliance over creativity. These findings resonate with Weberian bureaucracy critiques and point to the need for structural reforms that balance control with autonomy.
Ethical and Legal Integration	Integrating ethical awareness with legal norms is essential for maintaining professional integrity and just administrative actions.	Legal literacy, ethical reflection, moral reasoning in applying laws.	Legal officers described "difficulty translating abstract administrative principles into daily bureaucratic practice."	The gap between normative ideals and administrative practice underscores the need for contextual ethical education. Legal frameworks exist but are often applied mechanically, without moral interpretation. Encouraging reflective ethical

Theme	Description	Key Indicators	Supporting Evidence (Field Data)	Interpretation and Discussion
				reasoning can improve the moral quality of bureaucratic decision-making.
Governance Outcomes	Enhanced professionalism contributes to greater administrative accountability, transparency, and reduction of maladministration.	Transparent decision-making, fair sanctions, public satisfaction.	Field observations showed "increased procedural compliance and reduced complaint cases after ethical training programs."	The positive correlation between ethical professionalism and governance outcomes suggests that institutional ethics programs have tangible impacts. Improved compliance and reduced complaints indicate that ethics-oriented reforms can strengthen public trust and the legitimacy of administrative institutions.

Source: Processed by the author

The results reveal four primary themes that define the professionalism of civil servants in implementing Administrative Law in Indonesia. First, the perception of professionalism among civil servants extends beyond technical competence to encompass ethical integrity and legal obedience. Respondents perceive professionalism as a moral duty and a commitment to administrative justice, aligning with the framework of *public service ethics* proposed by Frederickson (2010). This perception reflects a shift from rulefollowing behavior toward valuebased accountability, indicating that professional identity is constructed through moral responsibility and compliance with administrative principles.

Second, significant institutional barriers persist within government structures. Participants identified hierarchical culture, limited discretion, and weak supervision as factors undermining professionalism. These findings echo Prasetyo (2022), who emphasized that bureaucratic rigidity and halfhearted functionalization hinder meritbased governance. The lack of supportive institutional culture prevents civil servants from exercising ethical judgment and often leads to procedural rather than substantive compliance with laws.

Third, the integration of ethical and legal frameworks emerges as a vital aspect of professionalism. Participants indicated that professional conduct in administration requires a balance between legal obligations and ethical reflection, consistent with the *Good Governance Theory* emphasizing transparency, accountability, and legality (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). However, implementation challenges arise due to low legal literacy and weak institutional mechanisms for ethical evaluation. This aligns with Mudhoffar, Frinaldi, and Roberia (2024), who found inconsistency in applying administrative law principles across government levels.

Finally, the governance outcomes demonstrate that strengthening professionalism correlates with improved administrative accountability and reduced maladministration.

Observations revealed enhanced compliance with legal procedures, improved service quality, and reduced complaint cases after institutions adopted ethical and legal training programs. This supports the assertion by Suma (2025) that cultivating moral integrity and adaptive ethics among civil servants leads to sustainable professional behavior and better governance performance.

Collectively, the findings support the development of a "ProfessionalismBased Administrative Law Model", which integrates three core components: (1) administrative legal principles, (2) ethical behavioral standards, and (3) institutional structures that promote accountability. This model emphasizes that professionalism is not merely a personal trait but an institutionalized system of values embedded in bureaucratic governance.

CONCLUSIONS

This qualitative study concludes that professionalism serves as an essential bridge between legal compliance and ethical conduct in Indonesia's administrative governance. The findings reveal that professionalism among civil servants is not limited to technical competence but extends to moral accountability, legal adherence, and institutional responsibility, all of which strengthen administrative justice and public trust. By integrating ethical awareness and the principles of administrative law, civil servants can enhance accountability, reduce maladministration, and promote transparent governance practices. These findings contribute to the refinement of *Good Governance Theory* through an empirical understanding of how professionalism humanizes the law by embedding ethical behavior within legal frameworks. Socially and culturally, the study highlights the urgency of cultivating a professional legal culture in Indonesian bureaucracy to counter hierarchical dominance and foster reflective administrative practice. Despite its contextual limitation to selected institutions, this research provides valuable insights and lays the groundwork for future explorations of professional ethics and administrative law across broader or comparative public administration settings.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that government institutions and policymakers develop structured training and supervision systems that integrate legal literacy with ethical decisionmaking to enhance civil servants' professionalism. For practitioners, the implementation of internal ethics committees and performance evaluations rooted in administrative law principles is suggested to sustain accountability and institutional integrity. Academics are encouraged to further investigate the interaction between professional ethics and legal compliance using mixed or longitudinal approaches to capture evolving bureaucratic behavior. Future research should also explore comparative studies across different cultural or governmental contexts to strengthen the generalizability and theoretical robustness of the professionalismlaw nexus. Ultimately, fostering a professional legal culture requires consistent collaboration between scholars, administrators, and policymakers to sustain ethical, transparent, and effective governance.

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