

Administrative service as civic practice: Pancasila-based public service ethics and the performance of educational support staff in a higher education faculty

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Abstract

Administrative and educational support staff (tenaga kependidikan) occupy a largely under-theorised position in the citizenship literature, even though they mediate the everyday relationship between higher education institutions and the students and citizens they serve. Drawing on the sociology of bureaucratic encounter and on Pancasila-based public service ethics, this study examines how the performance of faculty-level support staff at a public university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, enacts – or fails to enact – civic values of hospitality, responsiveness and accountability in the delivery of everyday administrative services. Rather than presenting new empirical data, the article offers a conceptual reinterpretation, through street-level bureaucracy theory, the New Public Service paradigm and Pancasila-based public service ethics, of indicators of staff performance and constraints previously documented in the field. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analysed indicators of staff performance (work quality, task accuracy, initiative, and competence) alongside organisational, individual, and cultural factors that shape service delivery. The findings show that staff performance sustains a broadly courteous and orderly service culture, but is constrained by weak task awareness, uneven competence, inadequate systems and facilities, hierarchical bureaucratic culture, and insufficient reward and evaluation mechanisms. These constraints are read here not merely as management failures but as breakdowns in the civic contract between the institution and its academic citizens. The article situates these findings within recent Scopus- and Web of Science-indexed scholarship on administrative service quality, street-level bureaucracy and public service ethics, and argues for reconceptualising administrative reform in universities as a form of institutional citizenship education. The article discusses implications for competency-based evaluation, digital service reform, and staff training.

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Introduction

Educational support staff (*tenaga kependidikan*) are members of the community appointed by institutional leadership to sustain the administration of education. Unlike lecturers, whose core duty is teaching, support staff underpin the managerial, administrative and technical conditions under which teaching and learning can occur. Under Law No. 20/2003 on the National Education System, *tenaga kependidikan* are defined as community members who dedicate themselves to, and are appointed to support, the provision of education, spanning roles such as heads of section, secretaries, librarians, laboratory technicians, and administrative, financial, personnel and public-relations staff. Ministerial Regulation No. 24/2008 on school and madrasah administrative-staff standards further specifies their duties as sustaining academic and non-academic administration, providing administrative services to educators and learners, and maintaining the effectiveness and efficiency of educational governance.

Performance is defined here as the observable conduct through which support staff realise their institutional role and scope of responsibility, encompassing work quality, timeliness, initiative, competence and communication. This definition rests on a formal evaluative framework that measures and shapes work behaviour and outcomes in order to raise institutional quality; Government Regulation No. 60/1999 on Higher Education, which framed such evaluation around performance standards supporting the educational process, has since been revoked by Government Regulation No. 17/2010, although the performance-based logic it introduced continues to inform staff evaluation.

Read narrowly, administrative service is a matter of internal human-resource management. Read as a citizenship phenomenon, however, the counter of a university faculty is one of the most frequent sites at which an institution enacts – or withholds – the courtesy, responsiveness and fairness it owes to those it serves. Internationally, street-level bureaucracy theory has long argued that citizens experience government not primarily through law or policy design but through direct, face-to-face encounters with front-line public employees, who thereby become, in effect, ‘the face of government to citizenry’ (Lipsky, 1980/2010). This repositions the discussion that follows: administrative service quality is treated not only as an operational indicator but as a form of everyday civic practice through which public institutions either build or erode trust with the citizens, students and colleagues who depend on them.

The central problem addressed in this study is the persistence of unfriendly and undisciplined administrative service in Indonesian higher education institutions. Contributing factors identified in the field include weak task awareness among staff, low human-resource competence, organisational shortcomings (inadequate systems, procedures and facilities), individual factors (physical fatigue, personal difficulties, limited empathy), and a hierarchical bureaucratic culture that discourages responsiveness. Staff indiscipline is in turn shaped by internal factors (low motivation and commitment, declining job satisfaction and emotional burnout), external-organisational factors (lax regulation, weak supervision, poor communication between leadership and staff), and environmental and resource factors (limited transport, distance from the workplace, and competing external obligations). This article asks: how should the performance of educational support staff be understood and reformed when read not only through a human-resource lens, but through the normative vocabulary of citizenship and public service ethics that Jurnal Civics addresses?

Method

This article adopts a qualitative descriptive and conceptual design. Rather than presenting new empirical data, it reinterprets indicators of support-staff performance (work quality, task accuracy, initiative and competence) and the organisational, individual and cultural constraints on service delivery previously documented in fieldwork at a faculty of a public university in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. These indicators and constraints are read through

a three-tier theoretical framework – street-level bureaucracy theory and the New Public Service paradigm, Pancasila-based public service ethics, and SERVQUAL/HedPERF-type service-quality constructs – and are then situated within recent international scholarship on administrative service quality and street-level bureaucracy.

Results and Discussion

Performance, constraints and institutional response

Article 39(1) of Law No. 20/2003 assigns support staff responsibility for administration, management, development, oversight and technical services that sustain the educational process. Field evidence indicates that unfriendly service linked to weak task awareness can be addressed through clearer articulation of roles and responsibilities, cultivation of proactive and empathetic attitudes, the setting and monitoring of explicit service standards, the deliberate building of a positive service culture led by example, and the use of recognition and reward to reinforce courteous conduct (Amba et al., 2023; Rachman & Djumiarti, 2019).

Where the constraint is low human-resource competence, the relevant response combines structured technical, managerial and communication training – including workshops and simulated service encounters – with continuous learning through mentoring, communities of practice and flexible e-learning, and with incentive structures (promotion, allowances, recognition) tied to demonstrated competence and periodic public feedback.

Organisational constraints – inadequate systems, procedures and facilities – call for strengthened regulation (codes of conduct, service standards such as the 5S courtesy framework of greeting, smiling and politeness), bureaucratic simplification through digitalisation, and investment in modern facilities and internal communication platforms, alongside stronger leadership and periodic evaluation with consequences for staff who disregard standards (Alshadiqa et al., 2025; Wibowo et al., 2014).

Individual-level constraints (fatigue, personal difficulty, limited empathy) are best addressed through structured rest periods and workload management, flexible scheduling, counselling support and mental-health awareness, and empathy training built around simulated service encounters and psychological safety (Larasati et al., 2020). Constraints rooted in hierarchical bureaucratic culture call for procedural simplification (e.g. business-process re-engineering), transparent national service standards, greater discretionary authority for front-line staff, periodic culture audits, and a shift towards merit-based evaluation grounded in public satisfaction rather than seniority.

Indiscipline attributed to internal factors is addressed through consistent, non-discriminatory enforcement of attendance and conduct rules (Presidential Regulation No. 21 of 2023), reward-and-sanction systems that combine material and moral recognition, attention to staff health and wellbeing, and professional mentoring (Adrianti et al., 2023; Kasni, 2022; Sampeliling, 2015). Indiscipline attributed to external-organisational factors calls for stronger institutional oversight, clear and consistently applied rules, and leadership attentive to staff workload; indiscipline linked to environmental and resource constraints is addressed through improved transport access, comfortable and adequately equipped workspaces, digital attendance systems, and staff participation in decisions that shape their working environment (Asmira et al., 2024; Nurazizah et al., 2025).

Theoretical framework: grand, middle-range and applied theory

To connect these empirical findings on staff performance to the citizenship studies literature that Jurnal Civics addresses, this article draws on three tiers of theory. At the grand-theory level, Lipsky's (1980/2010) account of 'street-level bureaucrats' provides the foundational claim that the citizens' lived experience of the state is produced not primarily by law or policy design but by the discretionary, face-to-face conduct of front-line public employees – in this case, faculty administrative staff. This grand theory is complemented by

Denhardt and Denhardt's (2000) New Public Service paradigm, which repositions public employees as servants of citizens rather than customers, emphasising democratic values, accountability and the public interest over managerial efficiency alone; this paradigm underlies the study's reading of 'friendly, disciplined service' as a democratic and civic good rather than merely an operational target.

At the middle-range level, this article draws on Pancasila-based public service and civic ethics. Dewantara et al. (2019) argue that civic education and public conduct in Indonesia cannot be separated from the five Pancasila precepts – divinity, just and civilised humanity, national unity, democracy, and social justice – which function as norms that public servants, including educational support staff, are expected to internalise as an organisational culture rather than apply as external rules. This middle-range theory bridges Lipsky's universal account of discretion with the specifically Indonesian normative order within which UNY's support staff operate, and gives the humanity and social-justice precepts direct explanatory purchase on why unfriendly or inconsistent service is experienced by students and colleagues as an ethical failure, not only an efficiency failure.

At the applied-theory level, the study draws on established service-quality instruments – SERVQUAL and its higher-education-specific adaptation HEdPERF – as documented in the international administrative-service-quality literature reviewed below, to operationalise the performance indicators (work quality, task accuracy, initiative, competence, communication) used in the original fieldwork. These applied constructs translate the grand and middle-range theoretical claims into measurable dimensions of service encounters, and provide the vocabulary through which future quantitative replication of this study, using validated HEdPERF-type instruments, could test the civic-ethics framework proposed here.

Comparative literature: administrative service quality in higher education

The findings reported above sit comfortably within a substantial recent literature on administrative and support-service quality in higher education, but they also expose a theoretical gap that this article seeks to address. Internationally, recent research has converged on the view that administrative support is not peripheral to the academic mission but constitutive of it.

Yidana et al. (2023), writing in the *British Journal of Education, Learning and Development Psychology*, model administrative service quality in higher education as a determinant of overall institutional performance, echoing earlier work that positions administrative units as responsible for sustaining, integrating, coordinating and supervising a university's core functions of teaching, research and public service, even though such units are frequently overlooked in institutional quality assurance frameworks. Their model, like the present study, treats staff competence, responsiveness and systems adequacy as the principal levers of service quality – a convergence that lends external validity to the four constraint categories (task-awareness, competence, organisational systems, individual factors) identified in the Yogyakarta faculty examined here.

A parallel and methodologically instructive contribution is the scoping review by Alvarez-Sández et al. (2023), published in *Education Sciences*, which surveyed Scopus-indexed literature from 2017 to 2022 on how higher education institutions measure administrative-process efficiency. Their review found that Lean and Six Sigma practices, combined with user-satisfaction instruments, dominate the field's efficiency-measurement toolkit. This is significant for the present study because it indicates that the Indonesian faculty examined here is still operating largely without such structured measurement instruments: the constraints reported by staff – inadequate systems and procedures, absent digitalisation, weak evaluation – correspond closely to precisely the gap that Lean/Six Sigma and SERVQUAL-type instruments are designed to close elsewhere.

Street-level bureaucracy: comparative empirical evidence

A further body of Scopus/WOS-indexed empirical work on street-level bureaucracy sharpens the civic-ethics reading proposed above. Davidovitz and Cohen (2022a, 2022b) show experimentally that the degree of trust front-line officials extend to citizens shapes whether they adopt caring or defensive coping strategies under workload pressure – a finding that helps explain why the present study’s respondents described empathy and proactive attitudes, rather than rules alone, as central to overcoming unfriendly service. Gershgoren and Cohen (2023) similarly document a state-favouring bias among front-line officials that can crowd out citizen-oriented discretion, reinforcing this article’s argument that hierarchical bureaucratic culture, left unaddressed, predisposes staff to comply with internal authority rather than respond to the people in front of them. Chang and Brewer’s (2023) systematic review of the street-level bureaucracy literature confirms that discretion, workload and organisational culture remain the field’s dominant explanatory variables – directly paralleling the organisational and individual constraint categories identified in the original fieldwork – while Gofen et al. (2025) extend the theory towards co-creation, suggesting that citizens (here, students and colleagues) are not merely recipients of administrative service but potential partners in improving it, a possibility not explored in the original fieldwork but worth raising as a direction for future research. Nagel (2025) adds a digital-transformation dimension, cautioning that digitalisation reshapes rather than eliminates discretion – relevant to this article’s recommendation that digital reform be paired with, not substituted for, values-based staff development. Finally, Alkraiiji and Ameen (2022) demonstrate that citizen trust and loyalty towards public-sector services are driven jointly by service quality and satisfaction, corroborating this article’s claim that administrative service quality has consequences for institutional legitimacy that extend beyond immediate user satisfaction.

Reframing the findings through a civic-ethics lens

Viewed through this three-tier framework, the five constraint categories identified in the original fieldwork acquire a civic-ethical reading that the management literature alone does not supply. Weak task awareness, for instance, is not only a training deficit but a lapse in what Pancasila ethics frames as *kemanusiaan yang adil dan beradab* (just and civilised humanity) – the expectation that every citizen who approaches an administrative counter, whether student, lecturer or member of the public, is treated as a bearer of dignity rather than as an interruption to routine. Low competence among support staff, similarly, is not simply a human-capital gap but a constraint on staff members’ own capacity to exercise the discretion that street-level bureaucracy theory identifies as inherent to their role; under-trained staff cannot meaningfully exercise the humane discretion that Pancasila ethics calls for, because they lack the procedural confidence to depart from rigid script when a citizen’s situation demands it.

Organisational constraints – inadequate systems, absent digitalisation, hierarchical culture – map onto what the New Public Service paradigm identifies as the structural precondition for democratic service: institutions cannot expect front-line staff to enact citizen-centred values while simultaneously denying them the procedural authority, digital tools and manageable workloads that such enactment requires. The hierarchical bureaucratic culture reported by respondents – in which staff defer upward rather than respond directly to the citizen in front of them – is precisely the pathology that both Lipsky’s discretion theory and the Pancasila unity/democracy precepts identify as corrosive of legitimate public authority: authority that flows only downward, never accountable to those it is meant to serve.

Individual-level constraints – fatigue, personal difficulty, burnout – are read in the international literature primarily as occupational-health issues to be managed through wellbeing interventions. The civic-ethics lens proposed here adds a further dimension: an institution that tolerates chronic staff burnout is, in effect, degrading its own capacity to deliver the humanity and social-justice values it professes, because an exhausted employee cannot consistently extend the courtesy and responsiveness that civic service ethics requires. Staff

wellbeing is thus reframed here not as a peripheral human-resource concern but as a direct precondition for the institution's civic legitimacy.

Implications for competency-based evaluation and digital reform

These findings, read alongside international literature on Total Quality Management and SERVQUAL/HedPERF applications in higher education administration, converge on a common recommendation: administrative reform must combine structural investment (digitalisation, facilities, procedural simplification) with values-based staff development, rather than treating either dimension in isolation. A purely technocratic reform – digitising forms and procedures without addressing hierarchical culture or staff wellbeing – risks reproducing unfriendly service through faster channels. Conversely, values training without adequate systems and manageable workloads risks becoming aspirational rhetoric disconnected from staff members' lived working conditions. The competency-based evaluation model implied by the original fieldwork's recommendations should therefore be read as one component of a larger civic-institutional reform agenda, in which periodic, competency-linked evaluation is paired with a genuine feedback channel from students and colleagues – the 'citizens' of the faculty – back into staff appraisal, closing the accountability loop that street-level bureaucracy theory identifies as chronically weak in hierarchical public organisations.

A further implication follows from the comparative Indonesian civic-education literature. Dewantara et al. (2019) note that Pancasila functions as the philosophical frame within which Indonesian citizenship education, and by extension Indonesian public administration, defines legitimate conduct; if so, faculty-level administrative reform cannot be designed on managerial grounds alone. Training curricula for support staff should, on this reading, explicitly incorporate Pancasila-based service ethics modules alongside technical and digital-competence training, so that the 5S courtesy framework already referenced in the original fieldwork is taught not as an isolated etiquette drill but as a concrete expression of the humanity and social-justice precepts. This would also give faculties a natural entry point for embedding administrative-service reform within the broader PPKn (*Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan*) curriculum and staff-development agenda, rather than treating civic values education as something that applies only to students and not to the staff who serve them.

Research gap and novelty

The literature reviewed above – spanning administrative-service-quality modelling (Yidana et al., 2023), Scopus-indexed efficiency measurement (Alvarez-Sández et al., 2023), street-level bureaucracy empirics (Alkraiiji & Ameen, 2022; Chang & Brewer, 2023; Davidovitz & Cohen, 2022a, 2022b; Gershgoren & Cohen, 2023; Gofen et al., 2025; Nagel, 2025), and multi-decade systematic reviews of higher-education service quality – consistently theorises administrative staff performance through managerial and quality-assurance frameworks (TQM, SERVQUAL, Lean/Six Sigma), and largely omits any normative or civic-ethical account of why service quality matters beyond institutional efficiency and citizen/student satisfaction metrics. Conversely, the Indonesian citizenship-education literature on Pancasila-based public service ethics (Dewantara et al., 2019) has developed a rich normative vocabulary for civic virtue in public administration, but has rarely been operationalised against empirical, indicator-based performance data from a specific institutional setting such as a university faculty. The gap this article addresses, therefore, is the absence of a framework that connects empirically observed administrative service performance in higher education to the normative vocabulary of citizenship and public service ethics, rather than treating these as separate literatures answering separate questions. The novelty of this article lies in reframing faculty-level administrative service performance data – originally analysed only through a human-resource-management lens – as a site of institutional citizenship practice, using a three-tier theoretical architecture (street-level bureaucracy and New Public Service as grand theory; Pancasila-based public service ethics as middle-range theory; SERVQUAL/HedPERF-type constructs as applied theory) that has not, to the authors' knowledge, previously been applied

jointly to Indonesian higher-education administrative staff performance data. This reframing offers Jurnal Civics' readership a concrete empirical anchor for a claim that is often made abstractly in civic-education scholarship: that the quality of citizenship enacted by a public institution is legible not only in its curriculum but in the conduct of the staff who greet, process and serve its citizens every day.

Conclusion

Where support staff lack competence appropriate to their service role, the consequences extend beyond individual performance: learning support becomes less effective, the quality of educational service declines, and learners' needs are not optimally met. Competence deficits among support staff are further associated with low professionalism, unpreparedness for educational-technology developments, and limited capacity to manage academic processes well. Incompetent support staff also risk generating dissatisfaction with educational services and impeding the overall achievement of educational goals. Read through the civic-ethics framework developed in this article, these are not only operational shortfalls but failures of institutional citizenship – lapses in the courtesy, fairness and responsiveness that a public educational institution owes the citizens it serves. Strategic training and continuing study to strengthen support-staff competence therefore warrant a range of approaches to developing skills, knowledge and professionalism on a sustained basis, framed explicitly as an investment in the institution's civic legitimacy and not only its administrative efficiency. Future research should test the three-tier framework proposed here quantitatively, using validated HEdPERF-type instruments alongside Pancasila-values scales, and should explore co-creation mechanisms through which students and colleagues participate directly in evaluating and improving the administrative services that shape their institutional citizenship.

Authors' contributions

Supandi: Conceptualisation, investigation, formal analysis, and writing – original draft. Suhadi Purwantara: Methodology, supervision, and writing – review and editing. Marita Ahdiyana: Validation, supervision, and writing – review and editing. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Competing interests

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Ethics Approval

This article is a conceptual reinterpretation of previously documented, aggregated indicators of support-staff performance and does not present new data collected from human participants; therefore, no ethical approval was required.

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