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Ethics in Village Public Service: An Observational Study in Gorontalo

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Abstract

Abstract: This article examines how administrative ethics appear in everyday public service at a village office in Gorontalo, Indonesia. The study uses a qualitative descriptive approach based on direct observation of service routines, staff behavior, waiting-room conditions, and interactions between citizens and officers. The purpose is to see whether ethical values such as fairness, transparency, responsiveness, and accountability are visible in daily service practice. The observations show that ethical behavior is present in polite greetings, willingness to help, and equal treatment for residents. However, several weak points still appear, especially slow responses during busy hours, limited information displays, uneven queue discipline, and occasional uncertainty about service requirements. These findings suggest that ethics in public administration is not only about formal rules but also about small routine actions that shape citizen trust. The article argues that service ethics improves trust when officers are fair, clear, disciplined, and easy to approach. The study offers a practical view of ethics at the village level and recommends clearer service standards, stronger complaint channels, and routine ethics training for staff.

Introduction

When they are slow, confusing, or unfair, trust weakens. In village-level administration, this issue becomes even more important because villagers often rely on one office for the first and most basic service contact. Recent studies show that public service ethics is closely tied to clean governance, transparency, and public confidence. Bowman and West (2017) explain that public service ethics continues to shift from abstract moral talk toward practical organizational behavior. Denhardt and Denhardt (2015) also stress that public servants should serve citizens, not merely manage them. In Indonesia, similar concerns appear in studies on licensing services, state apparatus ethics, and bureaucratic reform. Fitriana et al. (2023) found that integrity in licensing services depends not only on rules but also on how civil servants internalize values. Syadiyah et al. (2024) and Choirulsyah and Azhar (2024) also show that administrative ethics

supports clean and transparent governance. These studies make one point clear: ethics is not a side issue. It is the core of public service quality.

At the same time, many studies still focus on formal institutions such as licensing offices, education offices, police services, or district-level bureaucracies. Fewer studies look at the ordinary service setting where citizens interact with the state most directly, namely the village office. Yet village offices are important because they handle daily documents, letters, and administrative needs that affect school registration, social aid, migration, and local identity data. In this setting, ethical behavior is not only seen in major policy decisions. It is seen in whether officers greet residents, explain requirements clearly, keep records safe, and treat all visitors equally. This article takes that gap as its starting point. The scientific novelty of the article is simple but useful. Instead of discussing ethics only as a normative concept, this paper observes how ethics appears in routine service behavior at village level. The article focuses on the gap between formal service standards and the real habits of officers during daily work. The research questions are: how are ethical values practiced in village public service, and what obstacles reduce the consistency of those values? The objective is to describe the ethical pattern of service delivery and to identify practical improvements that can strengthen public trust.

Public service ethics has become one of the central issues in modern public administration because society today demands not only fast services but also fair and humane treatment from government institutions. Citizens increasingly pay attention to how they are treated when they visit government offices. They observe whether officers are friendly, whether procedures are explained clearly, and whether all citizens receive equal treatment regardless of social status or personal relationships. This situation shows that administrative ethics is closely connected to public trust and citizen satisfaction. In Indonesia, bureaucratic reform has encouraged public institutions to improve transparency, accountability, and service quality. However, ethical problems still appear in many public service institutions, especially at the local level. Delays, unclear procedures, lack of discipline, and weak responsiveness are still commonly found in daily administrative practice. These conditions create disappointment among citizens because the quality of public service often becomes the direct reflection of the government itself. Village offices hold an important role in Indonesian public administration because they become the closest government institution to the community. Citizens usually visit village offices to arrange identity letters, certificates, migration documents, family administration, and other public needs. Therefore, the ethical quality of village administration strongly influences the public image of government services. If village officers provide respectful and transparent service, public confidence toward the government increases. On the other hand, poor treatment can weaken trust and participation.

Another important issue is the growing expectation for public servants to communicate effectively with citizens. Communication ethics includes politeness, openness, patience, and the willingness to listen to public concerns. Ethical communication becomes especially important in village administration because many residents may not fully understand administrative procedures. Officers therefore need to provide explanations in simple language so that the service process becomes easier and less stressful for citizens. Several scholars explain that ethical administration supports democratic governance because it creates fairness and equal access to public services. Ethical values such as honesty, responsibility, responsiveness, and professionalism help public institutions avoid abuse of authority and strengthen accountability. In practical situations, ethics can be observed through small actions such as greeting visitors politely, maintaining queue order, responding to complaints calmly, and providing complete information without discrimination. This study also becomes relevant because observational research on village-level ethics remains limited. Many studies focus on urban institutions or formal bureaucratic systems, while everyday administrative behavior in village offices receives less attention. In fact, village offices represent one of the most frequent points of interaction between citizens and

the government. Observing this level of administration gives a more realistic understanding of how ethical values are practiced in ordinary situations. The article also contributes to the discussion of good governance. Good governance is not only related to laws and institutional systems but also to ethical behavior among public servants. Citizens usually evaluate governance not from official government reports but from direct experiences during public service interactions. Because of this, ethical service behavior becomes an important indicator of government quality.

Method

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with direct observation as the main technique. Qualitative observation fits this topic because ethics in public service is often visible in behavior, language, responsiveness, and service atmosphere rather than in numbers alone (Fadli, 2021). The research setting is a village office in Gorontalo, Indonesia. The observation focuses on the service process during several office visits, especially the reception of visitors, queue handling, explanation of service requirements, document processing, and the way staff respond to questions or complaints.

The observation was non-participant in nature. The researcher watched the service process without interfering with the officers' work. Field notes were written to record the visible actions of staff and the reactions of citizens. The notes were then grouped into ethical indicators such as fairness, transparency, responsiveness, professionalism, and accountability. The analysis followed three steps: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. To keep the findings credible, the same service patterns were checked more than once across different moments of observation. This method is suitable for a student journal article because it gives a simple but concrete view of ethics in daily administration. It does not aim to measure every aspect statistically. Instead, it aims to show what ethical service looks like in practice and where the weak points appear. The observation process was conducted during normal working days to ensure that the data reflected ordinary administrative activities. The researcher paid attention to several situations such as citizen arrival, staff interaction, service explanations, document handling, and waiting conditions. Observations were written immediately after each visit to avoid losing important details. The qualitative approach was selected because it allows the researcher to understand behavior and social interaction directly from the field situation. Ethics in administration cannot always be measured through numbers because many ethical indicators appear through tone of communication, body language, service attitude, and responsiveness. Therefore, direct observation provides a more realistic picture of public service ethics.

The researcher also compared repeated service situations to identify consistent patterns. For example, queue handling and officer responsiveness were observed at different times to determine whether service quality remained stable or changed depending on office conditions. This repeated observation process helped strengthen the credibility of the findings. Data analysis focused on identifying similarities and differences between ethical expectations and real service practices. Ethical indicators were grouped into categories such as courtesy, fairness, transparency, professionalism, accountability, and responsiveness. Each category was then interpreted using public administration ethics theory.

Results and Discussion

The observations show that ethical service at the village office is present, but it is uneven. Some parts of the service run well because officers are polite, answer questions directly, and try to help residents finish their documents. Other parts still need improvement because visitors sometimes wait without clear information, especially when several service requests arrive at the same time. This pattern matches earlier studies that argue ethics in public service works best when values are internalized in daily routines, not only written in official rules (Fitriana et al., 2023; Pamungkas & Munawir, 2025).

In daily practice, residents tend to judge ethics from things that seem small. A short greeting matters. A clear explanation matters. A calm tone matters. A visible queue order matters. Even the placement of forms and notices matters. These elements may look simple, but they shape how fair and trustworthy the office feels. This is why administrative ethics should be read as a practical habit, not only a formal code. Cooper (2016) argues that administrators are judged through the decisions they make and the way they carry those decisions into action. That idea fits the village office context very well.

1. Courtesy and Responsiveness

The first visible ethical dimension is courtesy. Most officers greet visitors politely and use everyday language that residents can understand. This helps reduce the distance between the office and the community. In public administration, courtesy is not a decoration. It is a signal that citizens are respected as service users, not as people who have to beg for help. The observations show that when officers speak calmly and avoid harsh words, visitors are more willing to ask questions and follow the service flow. This is consistent with the idea of the New Public Service, which places citizens at the center of administration rather than at the edge of it (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Responsiveness is visible when officers answer questions quickly and direct visitors to the right desk. Still, responsiveness is not always stable. During busy hours, some visitors wait longer before they receive an explanation. At those moments, the ethical quality of service becomes weaker, not because the officers intentionally ignore citizens, but because the workflow is not fully organized. Research on public ethics shows that integrity is often affected by small operational problems such as limited facilities, weak coordination, and unclear routines (Fitriana et al., 2023). The same pattern appears here.

2. Fairness and Equal Treatment

Fairness is one of the most important ethical values in public service. A public office should treat residents based on service rules, not based on familiarity, status, or personal closeness. In the observed office, the general pattern suggests that officers intend to treat residents equally. The problem is not open discrimination. The problem is inconsistency in queue discipline and service order. When a clear queue system is not visible, visitors may feel that service is moving through informal paths. Even if officers do not mean to be unfair, a weak service order can still create a feeling of unequal treatment. This finding matters because fairness is a core sign of bureaucratic ethics. Sengke et al. (2023) explain that the ethics of the state civil apparatus must support a hierarchical government system while still protecting moral principles in public service. In village administration, the meaning is straightforward: every resident deserves the same chance to be served, the same clarity about requirements, and the same standard of respect. A fair office does not need special words. It only needs a consistent process.

3. Transparency and Accountability

Transparency is the ethical value that residents notice when they try to understand what they must bring, where they must wait, and how long service should take. The observation shows that transparency is still limited because service information is not always displayed clearly. Some residents still ask the same questions more than once. This means the service flow depends too much on direct verbal explanation and not enough on written or visual information. A simple board showing requirements, working hours, service steps, and complaint contacts would already improve the situation. Accountability is also important because a village office manages public documents and public trust at the same time. If files are handled carelessly, people may lose time and confidence. Recent studies on public service ethics in Indonesia highlight that accountability, openness, and legal certainty are central to

clean governance (Choirulsyah & Azhar, 2024; Syadiyah et al., 2024). The observed office already shows a willingness to help residents, but it still needs a more visible accountability system. A simple logbook, an open service standard, and a complaint channel would make the service feel more responsible

4. Professional Discipline and Service Consistency

Professional ethics is seen in discipline, punctuality, and the ability to keep service moving predictably. The observations show that the office staff is generally cooperative, but service speed varies with the number of visitors and the availability of documents. This creates an impression that the office works well on normal days but becomes less efficient when the crowd grows. Public administration ethics is not only about being kind. It is also about being reliable. If an office starts service late, stops too often, or allows unclear procedures, then the ethical message becomes weak even if the staff are polite. This point connects to broader bureaucratic reform. Wibowo and Kertati (2022) argue that reform in public service must include both structure and behavior. Putra et al. (2020) also show that a merit-based and rule-based system supports clean government, especially when bureaucracy faces political pressure. In the village office setting, discipline means keeping service hours, following the queue, protecting documents, and making sure residents know what to do next. Professionalism is not a luxury. It is part of ethics.

5. Service Facilities and the Ethics of Care

The physical side of the office also affects ethics. A clean waiting area, readable notices, a safe document rack, and a clear desk arrangement make the service more humane. Even when officers work hard, poor facilities can still make the office feel closed, confusing, or unfriendly. Observation-based studies show that limited facilities often weaken the public's perception of integrity because residents connect the state with the visible condition of the office itself (Pamungkas & Munawir, 2025; Anđelković, 2023). The ethics of care matter here. When the office pays attention to elderly citizens, residents with limited mobility, or people who come from far away, the service feels more respectful. If officers are flexible in helping these groups without breaking the rules, ethics become real. This point is also seen in Fitriana et al. (2023), who note that equality of treatment and openness must go together with practical support. In other words, ethics is not only about what the office says. It is about what the office makes easier for people.

6. Public Trust as the Main Outcome

The strongest conclusion from the observations is that ethics and trust are directly linked. Residents do not usually use technical terms such as governance theory or administrative morality. They simply decide whether the office feels trustworthy. Trust grows when service is clear, fair, and calm. Trust drops when service is slow, confusing, or dependent on personal connections. This is why ethical behavior should be treated as a daily management issue, not as a formal slogan on the wall. Recent literature supports this view. Bowman and West (2017) show that public service ethics has shifted toward practical accountability and public value. Peiffer and Walton (2022) also highlight that public behavior can improve when institutions send the right message and make ethical action easier. For a village office, the implication is simple. If staff want citizens to trust the office, the office must make good ethics visible in ordinary service routines.

Table 1. Observation Notes on Ethical Service Indicators

Ethical indicator	Observed sign	Practical meaning
Courtesy	Officers greet visitors and use calm language	Residents feel respected
Fairness	Service is mostly equal, but the queue order is not always visible	Rules need to be more consistent
Transparency	Requirements are explained verbally more than in writing	Information boards are needed
Responsiveness	Questions are answered, but delays appear during busy hours	Workflow needs stronger coordination
Accountability	Staff try to help, but complaint channels are weak	Service control should be clearer

Source: Author's observation notes, 2026.

7. Communication Ethics in Daily Service

Communication ethics becomes one of the strongest indicators of administrative quality in village public service. During the observation process, communication patterns between officers and residents influenced the atmosphere of the office significantly. When officers used polite language and listened carefully, residents appeared calmer and more cooperative. On the other hand, unclear explanations created confusion and repeated questions. Communication ethics is important because citizens often arrive at the office with limited knowledge about procedures and requirements. Some residents may feel nervous or uncomfortable when dealing with official administration. Therefore, officers need to create a welcoming atmosphere through respectful communication. A simple greeting and patient explanation can reduce tension and improve citizen satisfaction. The observations also show that communication quality affects service efficiency. When explanations are clear from the beginning, citizens understand what documents to prepare and what steps to follow. This reduces repeated visits and misunderstandings. In contrast, incomplete explanations may create delays because residents must return with missing documents.

8. Ethical Challenges in Limited Resource Conditions

One important finding from the observation is that ethical service quality is also influenced by resource limitations. Village offices often operate with limited facilities, small staff numbers, and high service demand. These conditions create pressure on officers, especially during busy periods. Limited resources sometimes make it difficult to maintain consistent responsiveness. Officers may become overwhelmed when several residents arrive simultaneously with different administrative needs. As a result, waiting time becomes longer and communication quality may decrease. This situation does not necessarily mean that officers lack ethical awareness. Instead, it shows that organizational limitations can influence ethical performance. This finding supports previous studies explaining that good governance requires not only ethical values but also institutional support. Ethics becomes more effective when public institutions provide clear procedures, adequate facilities, and manageable workloads for staff members.

9. Public Perception and Citizen Satisfaction

Citizen satisfaction is closely related to ethical behavior in public administration. Most residents judge the quality of public service from direct experience rather than official regulations. They remember whether officers were respectful, whether information was easy to understand, and whether the service process felt fair. During the observation, several residents appeared satisfied when officers responded quickly and explained procedures clearly. Positive interaction created a more cooperative relationship between the office and the community. However, dissatisfaction appeared when visitors waited too long without information or when queue order became unclear. This finding shows that ethics directly shapes public perception of government institutions. Citizens are more likely to trust public institutions when administrative processes feel transparent, respectful, and predictable.

Trust is important because it encourages community participation and reduces conflict between citizens and government offices.

10. Ethics and Good Governance

The relationship between ethics and good governance is visible throughout the observation process. Ethical values such as fairness, transparency, accountability, and professionalism help create more effective public administration. Without ethics, administrative procedures may become rigid, confusing, and disconnected from public needs. Good governance requires more than technical efficiency. It also requires humane interaction between government officers and citizens. Ethical administration encourages officers to see citizens as individuals who deserve respect and assistance rather than as administrative burdens. This study confirms that ethical improvement does not always require expensive reform. Small practical changes can already improve service quality significantly. Clear information boards, organized queue systems, better complaint channels, and regular staff discipline can strengthen ethical administration at the village level.

Conclusion

This article shows that administrative ethics at the village office appears in small but important daily actions. Polite greetings, equal treatment, responsiveness, and a willingness to help residents are the strongest ethical signs in the observed service process. At the same time, the office still faces practical weaknesses in queue discipline, information display, service consistency, and complaint handling. The study concludes that ethics in public administration is not only a matter of formal rules or written codes. It is a habit that must be visible in service flow, staff behavior, and the physical order of the office. When the office becomes clearer, fairer, and more reliable, public trust grows naturally. The most practical suggestions are simple: display service requirements clearly, strengthen the queue system, improve complaint access, and provide regular ethics training for officers. For student research, this topic is useful because it shows that ethics is not abstract. It can be seen, heard, and felt in everyday administration. This study also highlights that ethical administration should become part of organizational culture, not only a written regulation. Ethical culture develops when officers consistently practice fairness, openness, discipline, and respectful communication in everyday situations. Village offices that maintain ethical standards are more likely to gain long-term public trust and stronger community participation. Future research can expand this topic by comparing several village offices or by combining observation with interviews and surveys. Comparative studies would provide broader understanding about ethical challenges in local administration across different regions.

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