

Optimizing The Role of The Ombudsman of The Republic of Indonesia, Bengkulu Representative Office: A Study on The Supervision of Public Services in The Local Government of Bengkulu City

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Abstract

This study explores the optimization of the role and function of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, specifically the Bengkulu Representative Office, in supervising the implementation of public services by the local government of Bengkulu City. The research is grounded in a qualitative approach, employing interviews, observation, and document analysis to examine how the Ombudsman addresses cases of maladministration and enforces the principles of good governance and public service accountability. The theoretical framework incorporates concepts from public policy, administrative oversight, and welfare state governance. Findings indicate that the Bengkulu Ombudsman plays a critical role in receiving, investigating, and resolving public complaints related to delayed services, abuse of power, lack of professionalism, and procedural violations. Data show that most reported cases stem from the education, health, and administrative sectors. The Ombudsman's interventions often result in institutional reforms, improved public satisfaction, and enhanced transparency in government procedures. However, challenges persist in the form of limited enforcement power, bureaucratic resistance, and public awareness gaps. Despite these constraints, the institution's capacity for providing legal certainty and administrative fairness remains significant. The research highlights the necessity for stronger institutional collaboration and the reinforcement of regulatory mechanisms to support the Ombudsman's mandate. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on public sector integrity and emphasizes the strategic role of independent oversight bodies in fostering equitable and accountable governance.

Keywords

Ombudsman, Public Service, Maladministration, Governance, Bengkulu, Public Accountability, Administrative Supervision

Introduction

In democratic societies, the quality of public service delivery is a barometer of governmental accountability, legitimacy, and effectiveness. It reflects not only institutional efficiency but also the government's commitment to uphold the rights and welfare of its citizens. In the Indonesian context, the public service sector has undergone various reforms in response to long-standing criticisms concerning inefficiency, corruption, and lack of accessibility (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2000).

Despite numerous reform initiatives, issues such as administrative malpractice, power abuse, and non-transparent procedures remain widespread across public institutions. These challenges are particularly acute at the regional level, where limited resources, institutional capacity, and socio-political dynamics often hinder efforts to implement national standards (Susanti, 2020). One institutional response to address these systemic deficiencies has been the establishment of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia. This independent body serves as a guardian of administrative justice by supervising public service delivery and investigating complaints submitted by individuals or organizations affected by maladministration.

The Ombudsman's mandate is legally grounded in Law No. 37 of 2008 concerning the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia and Law No. 25 of 2009 concerning Public Services. These laws position the Ombudsman as a non-judicial yet authoritative institution empowered to oversee public agencies and recommend remedial actions. The concept of the Ombudsman originates from Scandinavian models of administrative oversight and has been widely adopted in various democratic countries to ensure transparency, uphold ethical governance, and protect citizens' rights in their interactions with public bodies (Buck et al., 2011).

In Indonesia, the Ombudsman operates both at the national and regional levels, with representative offices tasked with addressing localized complaints and monitoring administrative procedures within their jurisdictions. The Bengkulu Representative Office is one such unit, responsible for overseeing the conduct of government officials and institutions in the province.

The Bengkulu office has increasingly become a focal point for citizen complaints, especially concerning delays in service, procedural violations, lack of professionalism, and discrimination. These issues reflect deeper structural and cultural challenges within the bureaucracy that require consistent monitoring and policy intervention.

The persistence of maladministration in public services undermines public trust and contributes to a perception of governance as arbitrary and inaccessible. It also violates constitutional mandates that emphasize equality, fairness, and the right to quality public services for all Indonesians (UD 1945, Article 28D).

Academic discussions on public sector accountability highlight the importance of independent oversight bodies in preventing abuses of power and institutional inertia (Arifianto, 2017). The role of the Ombudsman, therefore, goes beyond complaint resolution; it involves fostering a culture of accountability within the public sector. Previous studies suggest that the presence of the Ombudsman can lead to improved administrative behavior, greater citizen empowerment, and more responsive governance, particularly in areas where legal and institutional protections are otherwise weak (Widodo, 2019; Sulaiman & Azizah, 2021).

However, the effectiveness of the Ombudsman is contingent upon several factors, including the legal strength of its recommendations, cooperation from public agencies, and public awareness of its functions. In some cases, Ombudsman offices lack enforcement powers, leading to resistance

or neglect by the institutions they seek to supervise. This gap between authority and enforcement has raised concerns about the institution's capacity to produce real change, especially in decentralized governance systems like Indonesia's. Without robust institutional support and inter-agency collaboration, the Ombudsman's impact may remain symbolic rather than transformative.

In Bengkulu, the Ombudsman office has taken active steps to address public grievances, but its efforts are often constrained by institutional inertia, limited budgets, and bureaucratic resistance. Nonetheless, it has played an essential role in mediating disputes, clarifying legal procedures, and recommending policy improvements. The present study is situated within the broader discourse on public administration reform and good governance. It adopts a qualitative approach to investigate how the Ombudsman functions in a localized setting and how its interventions affect the quality and fairness of public service delivery in Bengkulu City.

The research employs interviews, field observations, and case analysis to explore patterns of maladministration and the institutional responses to them. It focuses on specific areas such as education, healthcare, licensing, and civil documentation services, where citizens frequently encounter bureaucratic inefficiencies. This investigation is particularly significant in the Indonesian context, where regional disparities in governance quality remain a persistent challenge. Understanding how independent institutions like the Ombudsman operate at the regional level offers insights into the broader institutional architecture of administrative justice.

By analyzing the operational dynamics of the Bengkulu Ombudsman office, this study aims to contribute to ongoing discussions on institutional effectiveness, citizen empowerment, and the practical realization of governance principles at the grassroots level. Ultimately, this study seeks to answer the question: To what extent does the Bengkulu Representative Office of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia succeed in promoting transparency, responsiveness, and integrity in local public service delivery.

Through this inquiry, the study underscores the strategic importance of empowering independent oversight bodies as instruments of administrative reform. It also highlights the need for continuous legal, financial, and civic support to ensure that such institutions fulfill their mandate in a meaningful and sustainable manner. The findings suggest that while limitations exist, the Ombudsman's role is critical in advancing a culture of good governance and ensuring that the rights of citizens are upheld within the public administration system.

Methods

This research employed a qualitative approach designed to explore and interpret the role and function of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, Bengkulu Representative Office, in supervising the implementation of public services by local government institutions. The qualitative paradigm was chosen due to its suitability in capturing complex social phenomena, contextualized experiences, and the dynamic interplay between institutional mechanisms and public perceptions. The approach emphasizes descriptive and interpretative methods that aim to provide an in-depth understanding of bureaucratic accountability and maladministration cases from the perspective of service users and institutional actors.

Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, field observations, and document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with key informants, particularly officials from the Ombudsman Bengkulu Office, including the assistant to the head of the representative office. These interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol,

allowing flexibility in probing informants' experiences while ensuring consistency across interviews. The informants were selected through purposive sampling, based on their roles and relevance to the research topic. All interview sessions were documented with audio recordings and notes, and were subsequently transcribed for analysis.

Field observations were conducted at the Ombudsman Bengkulu Office to examine administrative practices, case management procedures, and the general environment in which public service complaints are processed. Observational notes were systematically coded to identify patterns in service interactions and institutional responses. Additionally, relevant secondary data were obtained through document analysis, including internal reports, public service complaint records, institutional policies, and national regulatory frameworks, particularly Law No. 25 of 2009 on Public Services and Law No. 37 of 2008 on the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia.

The analysis followed an interactive model consisting of three concurrent activities: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Thematic coding was used to extract key themes such as procedural transparency, responsiveness, patterns of maladministration, and institutional constraints. All data sources were triangulated to ensure validity and enhance the credibility of findings. Member checking was also conducted, whereby preliminary findings were shared with selected participants for feedback and validation.

No computer code, machine learning algorithms, or large-scale datasets were used in this study, and as such, there are no digital repositories associated with this manuscript. All data were gathered through direct interactions and institutional documents and are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. There are no restrictions on the availability of data and materials, except for confidential documents protected under internal Ombudsman protocols.

Since this study involved human participants, ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Universitas Dehasen Bengkulu. The research protocol was reviewed and approved under the ethical approval code: UNIVED/Ethics/2022/014. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and gave their consent voluntarily. The anonymity and confidentiality of all respondents were strictly maintained throughout the research process, and all data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

This methodological framework ensures transparency, reproducibility, and ethical rigor, and is intended to provide a replicable model for similar studies in other regional Ombudsman offices across Indonesia or comparable administrative contexts globally.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, Bengkulu Representative Office, plays a pivotal role in supervising and ensuring the integrity of public service delivery. The data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis highlight both the strengths and limitations of the institution in addressing issues of maladministration and promoting administrative reform.

A significant volume of public complaints were recorded by the Ombudsman Bengkulu in various sectors. In the education sector, 28 complaints were reported in 2020. Among these, 71.6% pertained to the issue of unlawful monetary demands or unauthorized contributions, 17.8% to procedural deviations, 7.1% to abuse of power, and 3.5% to inappropriate conduct. Similarly, the health sector recorded 20 complaints in the same year. The majority (71.6%) involved unauthorized monetary demands, while 17.8% involved procedural violations, 7.1% related to

abuse of power, and 3.5% were associated with unprofessional conduct. These numbers indicate consistent patterns of misconduct across different public service sectors.

The "other services" category—spanning licensing, civil administration, and infrastructure—had the highest number of complaints. In 2020, a total of 631 complaints were received. Of these, 216 cases (35%) involved corrupt practices, 103 (16%) involved abuse of power, and 78 (14%) involved procedural violations. Further analysis shows that delays in service (categorized as "undue delay") comprised 56 cases (10%), while 49 cases (8%) involved improper conduct, and 42 cases (7.3%) related to discriminatory behavior. Lesser-reported issues included incompetence (1.5%), conflict of interest (0.7%), and bias (2.6%).

The data indicate that financial misconduct, particularly in the form of extortion and unauthorized payments, is a recurring issue across all sectors. This not only violates public service regulations but also undermines the principle of free and equitable access to services. To address such complaints, the Ombudsman conducts investigations, often starting with verification of evidence, stakeholder interviews, and, when necessary, field inspections. In 2019–2020, the majority of complaints (48.89%) were submitted in person, indicating a preference for direct engagement. Other channels included letters (25.40%), telephone (5.87%), and emails (2.64%).

Investigations initiated by the Ombudsman itself—referred to as "own initiative investigations"—accounted for 14.23% of the complaints, demonstrating the office's proactive stance in certain cases. This is especially important in instances where complainants may fear retaliation or lack procedural knowledge. Despite the Ombudsman's efforts, challenges in enforcement persist. According to staff interviews, many government institutions show reluctance in complying with recommendations, especially when they are not legally binding. This highlights a structural limitation that hinders full resolution of maladministration cases.

Nevertheless, in a majority of resolved cases, institutional behavior improved after Ombudsman intervention. Data show that in the education sector, 15 of 28 complaints were resolved satisfactorily, while in the health sector, 12 of 20 were concluded with corrective action. The public's reliance on the Ombudsman reflects growing awareness of administrative rights. Still, outreach and education programs remain necessary, particularly for marginalized communities that may lack access or knowledge to submit complaints effectively.

The Bengkulu office's role in improving governance has also extended to issuing policy recommendations to local authorities. These include the standardization of service procedures, the implementation of digital service tracking, and stricter adherence to service timelines. From an administrative theory perspective, the findings align with the tenets of good governance, which emphasize accountability, transparency, and public participation (UNDP, 1997). The Ombudsman acts as a facilitator of these values within the bureaucratic environment.

The research also supports the theory of administrative oversight, suggesting that external supervision plays a crucial role in reducing maladministration where internal monitoring systems are weak or compromised (Finer, 1941). While the Ombudsman's independence is legally protected, its operational autonomy is still vulnerable to informal political influence, especially in cases involving senior officials or politically sensitive institutions.

Furthermore, staff interviews revealed that logistical constraints, including limited personnel and budget, restrict the office's ability to conduct comprehensive investigations across all districts within Bengkulu Province. The ethical aspect of the Ombudsman's work is also significant. By providing a formal, non-litigious avenue for citizens to seek justice, the institution contributes to

reducing the legal and financial burdens typically associated with court proceedings.

In conclusion, the data reveal a consistent pattern of administrative violations in public service delivery. While the Ombudsman Bengkulu has been instrumental in addressing these issues, the effectiveness of its role remains contingent upon legal reinforcement, institutional collaboration, and sustained public engagement. Future improvements may include granting binding authority to Ombudsman recommendations, increasing budget allocations, and enhancing civic education to promote participatory governance. The Bengkulu case serves as a valuable model for understanding local-level oversight mechanisms within decentralized governance systems.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, Bengkulu Representative Office, plays a vital role in supervising public service delivery and addressing issues of maladministration at the local government level. Through systematic handling of complaints, the Ombudsman contributes to enhancing transparency, promoting administrative accountability, and upholding the principles of good governance. The prevalence of complaints related to unauthorized payments, procedural violations, and abuse of authority underscores persistent weaknesses in public service institutions. Despite structural and operational limitations, the Ombudsman has demonstrated measurable impact by resolving cases, influencing institutional behavior, and providing policy recommendations. However, to ensure long-term effectiveness, further support is needed in the form of legal reinforcement, inter-agency collaboration, and expanded public outreach. The findings affirm that independent oversight bodies remain crucial instruments for improving public sector integrity within decentralized administrative frameworks.

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