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Transparency, Accountability, and Public Participation as Pillars of Good Governance: Evidence from Public Administration in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine how the application of transparency, accountability, and participation takes place within the public administration system of Indonesia and determine the influence of all three concepts on good governance and public trust in the government institutions. Qualitative research method will be applied in this case, involving a literature review and policy analysis to examine regulatory frameworks and innovations in the area of public administration at both national and regional levels in Indonesia. The results show that information transparency, accountability of public sector, and participation of citizens play an important role in the improvement of the efficiency of the administrative process and democracy in the country. Nevertheless, there are some issues related to the resistance of bureaucracy, lack of digitalization in some parts of Indonesia and civic participation in other regions. It is important to develop institutional mechanisms, digital governance and participation platforms to improve the quality of governance.

Keywords: *Good governance; transparency; accountability; public participation; public administration; Indonesia*

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the theory of good governance has emerged as one of the most important paradigms in the fields of public administration and public policy discussions across the globe. Good governance entails the ability of a government to function in a way that is open, accountable, and participatory so as to facilitate legitimacy and efficiency in public institutions. Good governance is commonly viewed as an important tool in promoting democratization, efficient public services provision, and the building of trust between citizens and governments (Bovens, 2007; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; Meijer et al., 2012).

Transparency means the extent to which the government institutions are open in provision of information concerning decision making process, public policies and administration (Fox, 2007; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013).

It allows citizens to oversee government activities and decreases chances for any abuse or corruption (Fox, 2007; Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013). In turn, accountability implies the necessity for public officials and organizations to account for their activities and be responsible to citizens, monitoring agencies and other parties (Bovens, Goodin, & Schillemans, 2014). Public participation is focused on participation of citizens in the governance processes and includes all stages of policy making process – development, implementation and evaluation (Fung, 2015; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014).

Incorporation of the three concepts, transparency, accountability, and public participation, is considered the bedrock of good governance principles that are advocated for by international organizations such as the World Bank, UNDP, and OECD. These organizations are cognizant of the fact that good governance is not possible without sound institutional structures that promote transparency, accountability, and public participation in governance matters (OECD, 2017; UNDP, 2019). As a result, there have been many governance reforms in many countries to promote transparency, accountability, and participatory governance processes.

When it comes to the governance reforms in developing countries, one can observe that these reforms are associated with political and administrative changes as well. One can refer to the example of Indonesia that has experienced considerable institutional changes after the political reform period in 1998. The government of Indonesia has developed a lot of regulation systems and programs aimed at improving the level of governance. The Public Information Disclosure Law (Law No. 14 of 2008) is among the most significant measures implemented by the government, according to which the public institutions are obliged to deliver information to people.

Moreover, there have been attempts in Indonesia to incorporate a number of accountability instruments in public administration, such as performance-based budgeting, public service standards, and evaluation procedures aimed at making government institutions more efficient and effective. Such reform seeks to reinforce the accountability of the institutions and make public officers accountable for the provision of high-quality public services (McLeod, 2010; World Bank, 2020). Besides, the Indonesian government has encouraged participatory governance approaches through measures like public consultation, community forums, and participatory development planning (Antlov et al., 2016).

However, despite the aforementioned governance reforms, a variety of challenges arise in implementing transparency, accountability, and participation within Indonesia's public administration. According to several studies on Indonesia's governance problems, such difficulties as bureaucratic inertia, regional disparities in administrative capacity, weak digital infrastructure, and low civic engagement can be found in some areas (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014; Meijer, 2015). Also, governance reforms may encounter a number of institutional barriers connected to bureaucratic culture and fragmentation of policy implementation.

The emerging innovations in the area of digital governance have opened up new possibilities for the enhancement of transparency and participation. The usage of digital platforms, open data, and e-government systems allows governments to offer more transparent information and engage citizens in the process of governance (Meijer, 2015; Mergel, Edelmann, & Haug, 2019). In the case of Indonesia, the introduction of digital governance systems has been actively encouraged within the context of the wider administrative reforms designed to enhance public services and improve government accountability. Nevertheless, the success of such endeavors is highly dependent on several key factors.

Even though there is a large number of studies that explore how transparency, accountability, and citizens' participation affect the process of governance reforms, it can be noted that many studies do not look into the relationship between these governance aspects, but instead focus on each of them separately. Thus, for instance, some researchers consider transparency practices such as open government and information disclosure (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2013; Meijer, 2015), while others study mechanisms of accountability in public sector organizations (Bovens et al., 2014). Likewise, the aspect of participatory governance is studied separately from its relationships with other elements of governance (Fung, 2015; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014).

As a result, there still exists a necessity of an approach that considers the way how transparency, accountability, and public participation operate together as interrelated components of good governance. The importance of studying the interaction between the governance principles under consideration becomes obvious when we talk about developing countries like Indonesia because, in the case of such countries, reforms in the sphere of governance have complicated mechanisms of implementation.

Thus, the main goal of this research will be the analysis of the role of transparency, accountability, and public participation as key elements of good governance in public administration in Indonesia.

The innovation of this research is in its integration approach which seeks to understand how transparency, accountability and participation are mutually supportive dimensions of governance. While many other studies have examined these aspects of governance in isolation from each other, this study considers them together and shows how their interaction helps to enhance democratic governance and efficient administration. The integration of governance theories and Indonesian experience in governance reforms makes this study innovative for the field of governance studies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Good Governance in Public Administration

Good governance is one of the key frameworks adopted by contemporary public administration, highlighting the significance of such aspects as transparency, accountability, participation, rule of law, and efficiency in the process of governance. The international organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the World Bank, and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have always advocated for good governance as an important means to attain sustainable development and democratic governance (OECD, 2017; UNDP, 2019; World Bank, 2020). When talking about good governance in public administration literature, it usually refers to institutional setups that foster openness, responsiveness, and engagement of citizens in the decision-making process (Bevir, 2013; Pierre & Peters, 2020).

According to the researchers, good governance entails a paradigm shift from the conventional model of governance characterized by hierarchy of government to collaborative models of governance incorporating various stakeholders like civil societies, private sectors and the citizenry (Rhodes, 2012; Bevir, 2013). This paradigm shift is associated with broad-based public sector reforms, including New Public Management and New Public Governance, emphasizing efficiency, transparency and accountability within public organizations (Osborne, 2010). In this regard, transparency, accountability and participation of the public have been identified as major cornerstones in the governance process.

Governance reforms in developing nations are motivated by efforts to enhance democracy, reduce corruption and improve the quality of service delivery within the public sector. However, the application of good governance principles faces institutional and political hurdles such as bureaucratic opposition, poor administrative capacity and differential access to information and participation (Grindle, 2012; Andrews, 2013). Hence, an analysis of the interaction between the different governance principles is vital.

Transparency in Public Governance

The other element of good governance that is considered to be of high significance is transparency since it allows citizens to acquire information on government actions, decisions, and performance. Through transparency, the information asymmetry between government agencies and citizens can be reduced, enhancing public accountability and preventing corruption (Fox, 2007; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014).

In the field of public administration, the element of transparency is often linked to the notion of open government since open government implies making information of governmental nature open and encouraging citizens' involvement into the processes of governance (Meijer, Curtin, & Hillebrandt, 2012). In the framework of open government, there are such elements as freedom of information policies, open data, and digital platforms that ensure the accessibility of government information by citizens (Janssen, Charalabidis, & Zuiderwijk, 2012).

Empirical research has shown that there is a link between transparency and its ability to contribute positively to government accountability and citizen trust. Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2013) note that increasing transparency in governmental institutions will help citizens appreciate the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the government. Likewise, Cucciniello, Porumbescu, and Grimmelikhuijsen (2017) claim that the transparency policy can be used to promote responsive governance and strengthen democratic processes.

Nevertheless, transparency alone is unlikely to lead to the desired improvements in governance performance. In her study, Fox (2007) introduced a term “effective transparency,” indicating that it is important not only to increase transparency but also to implement mechanisms which will ensure that citizens and oversight bodies could hold governments accountable.

Additionally, the development of digital technology has led to an increase in the scope of activities connected to the transparency policy. Nowadays, digital governance platforms, open data portals, and e-government systems allow governmental organizations to provide information more effectively (Meijer, 2015; Mergel, Edelmann, & Haug, 2019). However, digital transparency still faces numerous difficulties, among which are data quality and digital inequality issues.

Accountability in Public Administration

Accountability is also a key principle in governance and can be described as the measures used to ensure that the actions and decisions of government officials are subject to scrutiny. According to Bovens (2007), accountability entails a relationship between an actor and a forum, where the former has an obligation to justify his/her actions and the latter has the right to inquire into and judge those actions.

There are several forms of accountability, namely political, administrative, legal, and social accountability, in democratic governance structures. Political accountability is practiced via elections and legislative control, administrative accountability is carried out using internal control measures such as performance management and bureaucracy, legal accountability is performed using judicial bodies and social accountability is facilitated via civil society organizations and citizens' scrutiny efforts.

The public sector reforms that have been implemented during the last decades have paid more attention to performance-based accountability arrangements aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the governmental institutions (Behn, 2001). In such an arrangement, there are usually some tools for measuring and reporting performance outcomes including performance indicators, evaluations, and reporting.

Nevertheless, the literature on governance reforms has identified some problems in accountability systems as well. Thus, Schillemans (2015) stresses that excessive demands for accountability result in the inefficiency of public institutions and "accountability overload." Moreover, the fragmentation of the accountability structure results in lack of clarity concerning the distribution of responsibility and control.

Accountability is the essential element of governance reforms since it allows government actors to be responsible for what they do in front of the citizens and public institutions.

Public Participation and Collaborative Governance

Participatory governance has emerged as an essential aspect of governance systems due to an increasing understanding that citizens must participate actively in public decision-making processes. Participatory approaches to governance ensure the participation of citizens in policy making, policy implementation, and evaluation to enhance democratic legitimacy and better results in policies (Fung, 2015; Nabatchi & Amsler, 2014).

Collaborative governance, which is more recent than participatory approaches to governance, is understood as governance through partnership between government agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Collaboration in collaborative governance implies the development of consensus, collaboration in decision-making, and collective action on problems.

Studies have revealed that participatory governance enhances the effectiveness of policies because of their consideration of the local knowledge and interests of communities (Fung, 2015). Moreover, mechanisms of participatory governance may promote social accountability of government.

However, there are some challenges that the process of participatory governance can face. In the case when participation is controlled by elites, it may result in unequal representation of community needs (Cornwall, 2008). Additionally, there may be some limits due to low civic capacity and political limitations.

With the development of digital technology, it became possible to promote participatory practices through the Internet. It resulted in creating digital participation and e-participation, which made it possible for citizens to interact with government bodies more often. Digital participation, however, also requires proper technological base and digital literacy on the part of citizens.

Integrating Transparency, Accountability, and Participation

While transparency, accountability, and participation have been considered individually as governance principles, many researchers suggest that the above-mentioned tools are highly interrelated and complement each other. Transparency creates a necessary informational basis for making governments accountable, and accountability instruments provide the consequences for poor performance of governments thanks to transparency (Fox, 2007; Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2014).

At the same time, participation of the public improves transparency and accountability instruments because citizens can participate in the process of governance and control the activities of the government. According to Fung (2015), participatory governance may contribute to building democracy by providing channels through which the citizens may influence public policies and make the government accountable.

Currently, there is a growing body of literature that studies the integration of the principles of openness and collaboration into governance models (Meijer et al., 2012; OECD, 2017). Such integration becomes especially important for studying the field of digital governance, where transparency, accountability, and participation tools can be integrated into one governance framework.

In countries like Indonesia, ensuring the inclusion of transparency, accountability, and participation continues to be a challenge because of various factors including institutional weaknesses and bureaucratic traditions. However, there is still room for improvement of the mentioned aspects of good governance through governance and digital transformations that are taking place.

METHODOLOGY

The current study utilizes a qualitative research methodology together with descriptive–analytical design in order to explore the dynamics of the importance of transparency, accountability, and public participation as essential elements of good governance in public administration in Indonesia. It is suitable to apply qualitative research methodology in investigating governance, institutional processes, and administrative dynamics in governmental organizations due to the possibility to get the detailed understanding of social and institutional contexts (John W. Creswell & Cheryl N. Poth, 2018).

Both primary and secondary data will be used for analysis in the framework of a qualitative research methodology in the current study. The fieldwork for this study will last for six months from January until June 2025. Fieldwork will take place in several public agencies that are located in West Java, Indonesia. This particular choice of West Java as the location for fieldwork is very relevant since the region implements the administrative reforms and digital governance and thus is a perfect site for investigation of transparency, accountability, and public participation.

The primary data were gathered via semi-structured and in-depth interviews with 25 interviewees including government officials, policy implementers, and key actors in public administration. The above-listed participants were purposefully selected among the representatives of local government bodies (organisasi perangkat daerah / OPD) and public service agencies. It is vital to include these subjects in the process since they participate in formulating and implementing governance policies, which means that they can give firsthand information on how the principles of good governance are implemented.

It is significant to note that the time frame of the study is appropriate because it covers recent trends in governance reforms, especially taking into account the post-pandemic period when digital transformation and innovation in public services increased.

Secondary data were gathered via document analysis (government regulations, policy documents, institutional reports, and academic literature). These sources are important to understand the formal framework of governance and confirm its consistency in terms of policy design and implementation.

The data were collected through the following methods: in-depth interviews, document analysis and administrative practice observations at chosen organizations. The latter is important to check whether transparency, accountability and participation are actually practiced in addition to official rhetoric. The use of these methods helps in triangulating the data and improving their validity and reliability by cross checking the information from different sources.

Generally, all elements of methodology - the time frame, the place, the respondents and the institutions – were carefully selected to provide for a complete analysis of good governance in public administration in Indonesia.

The data were analyzed using the method of thematic qualitative analysis, which involves such steps as data reduction, coding, categorization, interpretation and conclusion drawing. It allows identifying certain patterns and correlations between the principles of governance and public administration. To ensure the reliability and validity of the results, the study used data triangulation and source triangulation by comparing information provided by various informants and documents (Mark Bovens et al., 2014).

DISCUSSION

According to the findings of the research analysis, there is a high degree of significance attached to transparency, accountability, and citizen participation in the context of improving governance practices in the public administration of Indonesia. The three governance principles make it possible to improve administrative practices and promote democratic governance.

Transparency in Public Administration

The transparency programs in Indonesia have grown tremendously in the last two decades especially after the enactment of the Public Information Disclosure Law (No. 14 of 2008). This regulation is aimed at obliging public institutions to make available information about policy, budgeting, and administration.

Various government agencies in Indonesia have embraced technology-based transparency systems such as open data, e-government, and public information facilities. These measures are meant to improve the availability of government information for citizens and improve administrative accountability.

The study reveals that the implementation of transparency programs has helped in improving public scrutiny and citizen awareness about government operations. Nevertheless, there are variations in the implementation of transparency systems in different regions depending on administrative capacity and technological infrastructural differences.

Accountability Mechanisms in Public Sector Governance

Indonesia's public administration accountability system has become increasingly effective owing to a number of institutional changes such as performance-based assessment mechanism, financial audit, and public service performance indicator. Public institutions are expected to present their performance accountability report which will be the means of providing information about the accomplishments and implementation of policies and budgets of the institution.

The research findings indicate that the government responsiveness and the evaluation process of policies have become more effective as a result of the accountability system. Nevertheless, there are still some problems concerning the implementation of the accountability system in various government levels.

Public Participation in Governance Processes

Citizen participation has been gaining prominence in becoming an essential aspect of the practice of governance in Indonesia. There have been several ways that have made citizens engage in governance practices such as public consultations, participatory development planning, and community engagement programs. Through participatory governance, citizens can be involved in policy discussions, articulate their needs, and evaluate public services. There are several instances in which these participatory processes take place within local governments, and citizen involvement is central to development planning.

However, as indicated by the findings, there are several elements like civic capability, public knowledge, and openness of institutions that determine citizen participation in governance processes.

This research shows the importance of transparency, accountability, and public participation as key elements of good governance in public administration that depend on each other and serve as mutually reinforcing mechanisms that together improve the quality of governance. First of all, transparency is the key element of good governance as it allows the citizens to get access to the information about the policies and activities of government bodies. According to existing literature, transparency improves government legitimacy and increases citizen's trust in public institutions Grimmelikhuijsen, S., & Meijer, A. (2014); Cucciniello, M., Porumbescu, G., & Grimmelikhuijsen, S. (2017).. The results of this research confirm these claims by showing the positive influence of transparency measures in Indonesia on access to information and administrative control.

Nevertheless, transparency alone is not enough to ensure effective governance. Fox (2007) claims that alongside transparency mechanisms of accountability are needed for citizens and oversight organizations to be able to hold accountable government officials for their actions. Accountability mechanisms in Indonesia such as performance evaluation and institutional reporting have made great contribution to administrative effectiveness.

In addition, public participation further enhances governance systems by facilitating citizen participation in policy making process. Governance through participation enables governments to integrate citizen perspective and indigenous knowledge in the process of decision making which makes the policies effective and legitimate Fung, A. (2015); Nabatchi, T., & Amsler, L. (2014). The results of this study show that the efforts made by the Indonesian government in participatory governance provide an opportunity for citizen participation, especially in local governments.

However, the study reveals various obstacles related to governance reforms. Constraints that exist within institutions such as bureaucratic culture, differences in administrative capability, and low levels of civic participation still hamper the implementation of governance reforms. These constraints are in line with other literature regarding the difficulties in implementing governance reforms in developing countries Grindle, M. (2012); Andrews, M. (2013).

Digital governance provides opportunities for enhancing the systems of governance through transparency, accountability and participation. With digital technology, the government can effectively disseminate information, engage the citizens and be responsive to citizens' needs Mergel, I., Edelmann, N., & Haug, N. (2019); Meijer, A. (2015).

In summary, the results indicate that the improvement of governance in Indonesia is contingent upon an integrated effort involving the components of transparency, accountability, and citizen involvement in the context of an effective governance system. In doing so, the institutions will be able to improve administrative efficiency and responsive policy-making.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of this research prove that transparency, accountability, and citizen involvement are interconnected concepts that are essential for developing a good governance structure in Indonesian public administration. It is evident that all these components make an important contribution to the increase in the effectiveness of the administration, the development of democracy, and public trust in the government agencies. Due to transparency and its regulatory background and digital tools, people have better access to information. At the same time, the process of accountability has helped to promote institutional accountability and the implementation of policies. In addition, public involvement has enhanced the legitimacy of policy-making and responsiveness. However, some problems still prevent the implementation of these principles.

For the improvement of governance in general, it is important for governmental organizations to take a more holistic and systematic approach in the implementation of transparency, accountability, and public participation. The implementation of transparency can be done through the promotion of digital governance and open data initiatives, while accountability can be improved through performance evaluations and oversight. Besides that, it is also important for Indonesia to promote inclusive and technology-supported participatory processes in order to make sure that there is broad participation from citizens in the process of policy-making. It is also important to improve the capacity of institutions and administrative capability in order to overcome the bureaucracy problem.

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