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The Gap Between Ideals and Reality in Electronic Licensing Innovation (SIMPEL) in Bone Regency: A Philosophy of Administrative Science Perspective on Public Governance

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ABSTRACT

Governments increasingly use digital technology to improve public service quality, yet implementation still faces obstacles. This study analyses the implementation of the Electronic Licensing Information and Management System (*Sistem Informasi dan Manajemen Perizinan Secara Elektronik*, SIMPEL) at the Investment and One-Stop Integrated Services Office (DPMPTSP) of Bone Regency, Indonesia. It identifies the gap between its intended objectives and actual implementation from the perspectives of the philosophy of administrative science and public governance. A descriptive qualitative case study design was used. Data were obtained through a review of scholarly articles, previous studies, and relevant regulations, and were analysed by comparing ideal conditions with the documented implementation of SIMPEL. The findings show that SIMPEL facilitates licensing through online applications and the *Jemari Perak* permit delivery service. Implementation remains suboptimal, however, because outreach has not been continuous, staff competencies need strengthening, supporting facilities are inadequate, and the national licensing system has changed. Viewed philosophically, these gaps reflect an ontological problem concerning the nature of public service, an epistemological problem concerning the evidence used to judge success, and an axiological problem concerning the fair distribution of benefits. Successful public service innovation therefore requires not only technology but also organisational readiness, competent personnel, and citizen involvement. Local government should strengthen outreach, develop staff competencies, improve facilities, and evaluate the service regularly.

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INTRODUCTION

Public administration occupies a central place in government because it concerns how the state manages competing public interests and meets citizens' service needs. It involves not only rules, procedures, and the execution of tasks, but also the basic assumptions, sources of knowledge, and values that underpin service delivery. The philosophy of administrative science addresses these foundations through three elements: ontology, epistemology, and axiology (Ongaro, 2019). Ontology clarifies the nature of the object under study, epistemology explains how knowledge about it is obtained and tested, and axiology identifies the values that should be realised, such as justice, responsibility, and the common good (Ongaro & Yang, 2025; Wessels, 2021).

Technological change and rising public expectations have created pressure to renew public service delivery. Public sector innovation increasingly relies on technology to improve the effectiveness and quality of services (De Vries et al., 2016). Digital transformation, however, is more than moving manual procedures online; it reshapes processes, organisational structures, and the relationship between government and citizens (Mergel et al., 2019). E-government is expected to create public value in the form of services that are more efficient, open, accountable, and responsive (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019). Under a

public governance perspective, government cannot act alone and must work with citizens and other stakeholders (Torfing et al., 2019), because the value of public services is ultimately co-created by providers and users (Osborne et al., 2016). Digitalisation nonetheless introduces new problems into citizen–state encounters, so these principles are not always realised in practice (Lindgren et al., 2019).

Licensing deserves particular attention because it determines legal certainty for citizens and businesses. To simplify licensing, Indonesia introduced One-Stop Integrated Services (*Pelayanan Terpadu Satu Pintu*, PTSP) to reduce the time and cost of obtaining permits, in line with Law No. 25 of 2009 on Public Services. Local governments are also encouraged to innovate under the Ministry of Administrative and Bureaucratic Reform Regulation No. 30 of 2014 and Government Regulation No. 38 of 2017 on Regional Innovation. Within this framework, the DPMPTSP of Bone Regency introduced the Electronic Licensing Information and Management System (SIMPEL) as a technology-based channel to help citizens obtain permits (Amiruddin et al., 2023).

Despite its electronic platform, SIMPEL still faces obstacles. Amiruddin et al. (2023) found that many residents lacked adequate information about SIMPEL and therefore continued to apply in person at the service office. Outreach was not sustained, the file-tracking feature was underused, staff needed further training, and supporting facilities remained limited. These findings are consistent with research on e-government adoption, which shows that citizens' use of electronic services depends on perceived usefulness, ease of use, and facilitating conditions (Dwivedi et al., 2017). Differences in digital skills also determine who actually benefits from online services (Scheerder et al., 2017), while staff capability, leadership, and infrastructure shape the success of digital governance in Indonesia (Pribadi et al., 2024).

These obstacles point to a gap between the service that should be delivered and the service that is actually experienced. Electronic services are expected to make licensing easier, provide clear information, guarantee certainty, and save time and money. Digital self-service, however, can shift part of the administrative work onto citizens when they must navigate systems on their own (Madsen et al., 2022). This administrative burden comprises learning, compliance, and psychological costs incurred in dealing with the state (Halling & Bækgaard, 2024). Evidence from Indonesia's digital service reforms likewise shows that new systems introduced without transition management and user support can lower public ratings of procedures and processing time (Nabawi et al., 2026).

To examine these problems, this study uses the philosophy of administrative science as its analytical lens: ontology to clarify the nature and purpose of service delivered through SIMPEL, epistemology to assess the basis of knowledge about its success, and axiology to test the values of justice, openness, and responsibility it should realise.

Amiruddin et al. (2023) described the implementation, benefits, and obstacles of SIMPEL in Bone Regency, but no study has yet linked ontology, epistemology, and axiology to public governance principles in analysing SIMPEL. This article therefore analyses the gap between the expected and actual implementation of SIMPEL at the DPMPTSP of Bone Regency through these three philosophical dimensions and explains how the philosophy of administrative science can support good public governance. It argues that the success of public service innovation depends not only on technological progress but also on the government's capacity to provide services that are accessible, responsive to needs, and oriented to the public interest.

METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design using a case study method, which allows a phenomenon to be examined in depth within its real-life context (Harrison et al., 2017). The case is the SIMPEL innovation at the DPMPTSP of Bone Regency, selected because it is a technology-based public service innovation that can be assessed in terms of information openness, service efficiency, citizen involvement, and service quality. Data were collected

through a literature review of scholarly articles, previous studies, and regulations on public services and government innovation. The review was conducted integratively so that findings from diverse sources could be synthesised into a coherent understanding of the phenomenon (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2016). The principal case source was the study by Amiruddin et al. (2023), which directly documents the implementation, benefits, and obstacles of SIMPEL; this document was treated as secondary data within a qualitative document analysis (Morgan, 2022).

The data were analysed thematically by identifying, grouping, and interpreting patterns of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis compared the conditions that should be achieved according to theory and regulation with the documented implementation of SIMPEL in order to identify gaps in efficiency, information openness, citizen involvement, staff capacity, and supporting facilities. The results were then interpreted through the three dimensions of the philosophy of administrative science, namely ontology, epistemology, and axiology, as a framework for assessing the nature, knowledge base, and values of public service (Ongaro & Yang, 2025). This approach reflects the view that knowledge in public administration should be built with attention to context and to the diversity of knowledge sources (Wessels, 2023). Because the study relies on secondary data, its findings are limited to the information available in the documents reviewed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The DPMPTSP of Bone Regency developed its licensing services through SIMPEL. The system was first built in 2016 and became operational in 2018. Its features include online permit applications, levy calculation, application tracking, complaint submission, and form downloads, and its operation follows procedures set out in Regent Decree No. 383 of 2021. Alongside SIMPEL, the local government introduced *Jemari Perak* (*Jemput Antar Izin Penelitian dan Praktek*), a service that delivers completed research and practicum permits to applicants (Amiruddin et al., 2023).

The development of SIMPEL shows the local government's effort to use technology to improve licensing services, so that citizens no longer always need to visit the office. The availability of an application, however, does not guarantee that the innovation's objectives have been met. Research on e-government adoption shows that citizens use electronic services only when they know the service exists, perceive its benefits, and have adequate facilitating conditions (Dwivedi et al., 2017). The ability to use online services is also unevenly distributed, because differences in digital skills determine who can obtain tangible outcomes from technology (Scheerder et al., 2017). From a public governance perspective, government and citizens need to work together to produce valuable services (Torfing et al., 2019), and the value of a service is ultimately determined by users' experience rather than by the provider alone (Osborne et al., 2016). Innovation should therefore not be government-centred, but should take into account the conditions, needs, and capabilities of the citizens who use it.

The Gap Between Expected Conditions and the Implementation of SIMPEL

Amiruddin et al. (2023) show that SIMPEL has delivered several benefits to citizens, but obstacles mean that its results do not yet fully match its original aims. The gap appears in four areas.

Service efficiency. SIMPEL allows citizens to apply for permits without visiting the office, and both online and in-person applications are expected to be completed within two days (Amiruddin et al., 2023). Technology thus helps citizens save time and money. Not all citizens enjoy this benefit, however, because some still prefer to visit the DPMPTSP office in person. This is understandable: digitalisation does not remove citizens' need for direct interaction, and digital self-service can shift part of the administrative work onto citizens, so it is reasonable that some prefer assistance from staff (Madsen et al., 2022). Digital service encounters also create new forms of interaction that are not equally easy for all users

(Lindgren et al., 2019). The efficiency of electronic services therefore depends not only on system speed but also on how easily citizens can access and use them. The public value of e-government materialises only when the facilities provided are actually used (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019).

Information openness and outreach. SIMPEL includes file-tracking and SMS notification features. The government has promoted the system through technical guidance in 27 sub-districts, radio broadcasts, WhatsApp, Facebook, the official website, and campus visits. Outreach has not been sustained, however, so some residents remain unaware of SIMPEL or do not understand how to use its features (Amiruddin et al., 2023). Transparency thus cannot be achieved simply by building information features into an application. When citizens must work out how to use a service on their own, they bear learning costs that form part of administrative burden (Halling & Bækgaard, 2024). Without continuous outreach, information tends to reach only groups already familiar with technology, widening the digital divide (Scheerder et al., 2017). Openness therefore requires both clear information and active effort by government to disseminate it to all segments of society.

Staff capacity and facilities. Several officers who had received training are no longer posted at the DPMPTSP, and staff handling technical tasks still need further training. Limited facilities also mean that the system requires improvement, particularly in database management, website design, and service features (Amiruddin et al., 2023). This finding is consistent with evidence that staff skills, leadership, regulation, infrastructure, and information technology positively affect digital government services in Indonesia (Pribadi et al., 2024). Digital transformation requires organisational capabilities that are continually renewed, not merely the procurement of systems (Mergel et al., 2019). When staff rotate without knowledge transfer to their successors, the continuity of innovation is put at risk, because public sector innovation depends heavily on the capacity of the organisation that sustains it (De Vries et al., 2016). Staff development should therefore be continuous so that officers keep pace with technological change and citizens' needs.

Changes in service coverage. Since 2021, building permits have been processed through the national SIMBG system and business licences through the Online Single Submission Risk-Based Approach (OSS-RBA). As a result, SIMPEL now mainly processes research permits, while information on OSS remains available on the SIMPEL website (Amiruddin et al., 2023). Local innovations must therefore adapt to changes in national policy and platforms. Indonesia's experience with digital service reform shows that migration to new systems without transition management and user support can increase administrative burden and lower public ratings of procedures and processing time (Nabawi et al., 2026). Coordination across levels of government also remains an unresolved feature of Indonesian bureaucratic reform (Turner et al., 2022). The role of SIMPEL should therefore be judged not only by the number of permits it processes, but also by its capacity to serve as an information gateway that guides citizens to the right service.

Taken together, the four areas show that the problem with SIMPEL is not an absence of innovation but insufficient support for its implementation. Table 1 summarises the gaps.

Table 1. Gaps between ideal conditions and the implementation of SIMPEL

Area	Expected condition	Implementation of SIMPEL	Philosophical dimension
Service efficiency	Permits can be obtained online without visiting the office	Processing takes up to two days, but some citizens still apply in person	Ontology: service as ease for citizens
Information openness	All citizens know the service and can track their applications	Tracking and SMS features exist, but outreach is not sustained	Axiology: openness and fair distribution of benefits

Staff capacity and facilities	Trained staff and a continually developed system	Trained staff have been reassigned; database, website design, and features need improvement	Ontology and axiology: responsibility of the provider
Service coverage	Integrated licensing in a single system	Building permits moved to SIMBG and business licences to OSS-RBA; SIMPEL focuses on research permits	Epistemology: success measures must reflect the system's new role

Source: Authors' analysis, 2026

SIMPEL from the Perspective of the Philosophy of Administrative Science

The gap between the aims and the implementation of SIMPEL can be analysed through the three foundations of the philosophy of administrative science, which together clarify the purpose of service, the basis for judging success, and the values an innovation should produce.

Ontology. The ontology of public administration concerns the nature of government in serving citizens and meeting public needs (Ongaro, 2019). Applied to SIMPEL, the system should not merely provide an application, but help citizens obtain licensing services that are easy, certain, and transparent. That some residents still do not know about SIMPEL shows that the purpose of the service is not yet aligned with its actual use, and that citizens' needs and capabilities have not yet been the main consideration. A public value perspective holds that the essence of public service lies in the benefits citizens receive, not in compliance with bureaucratic procedure alone (Ongaro & Yang, 2025; Osborne et al., 2016).

Epistemology. Epistemology concerns how the information used to assess a service is obtained and validated. In implementing SIMPEL, the government relies on citizen satisfaction surveys and the complaint feature to gauge performance. Both sources, however, reach only existing users and do not represent residents who are unaware of or have never used the electronic system. In the authors' view, the success of SIMPEL should also be measured using data on the number of online applicants, the number of residents who still choose in-person service, and the difficulties users face. This is consistent with Wessels (2023), who argues that knowledge in public administration must draw on diverse sources and attend to context. Assessments of digital services should also consider citizens' experience across their entire interaction with government, not only system performance (Lindgren et al., 2019).

Axiology. Axiology concerns the purposes, benefits, and values to be realised, such as justice, responsibility, openness, and the public interest. SIMPEL has provided benefits through online applications and *Jemari Perak*, while in-person service remains available for residents unable to use technology. Retaining an in-person channel is important to prevent the exclusion of digitally disadvantaged groups (Scheerder et al., 2017). These benefits must nonetheless be extended through more accessible information, because an application alone is insufficient while some residents still struggle to learn about and use it. Government must ensure equal opportunity for every citizen to obtain services according to their needs, and involving citizens in designing and assessing services is a route to higher-quality public services (Torfing et al., 2019).

Together, the three perspectives show that the success of a government innovation cannot be judged by the availability of technology alone; it must also be judged by the fit of service objectives, the accuracy of the information used to measure results, and the benefits citizens actually receive. The philosophy of administrative science thus provides a basis for assessing whether implementation reflects government's purposes and responsibilities in serving the public.

Implications for Public Governance

The SIMPEL case shows that public governance requires not only policy support and

technology, but also information openness, accountable staff, citizen participation, and collaboration to improve service quality. In terms of openness, knowledge of SIMPEL is unevenly distributed. In terms of responsiveness, government needs to respond better to the difficulties users face. In terms of effectiveness and efficiency, online services have made progress but still require adequate facilities and competent staff. Democratic accountability requires public institutions to explain their decisions and service performance to citizens (Koliba, 2025), and Indonesia's experience with local government accountability reform shows that formal instruments become effective only when supported by institutional capacity and leadership commitment (Salomo & Rahmayanti, 2023).

Collaborative governance treats cooperation between government and citizens as essential to producing valuable services (Torfing et al., 2019). Citizens should therefore not merely receive services, but be involved in offering suggestions, raising complaints, and assessing service quality (Osborne et al., 2016). In the authors' view, the fundamental problem in implementing SIMPEL is the misalignment between technological development and the readiness of both the agency and its users. The government has introduced electronic services, but outreach, staff development, and supporting facilities still need attention. The same pattern appears in research on digital governance in Indonesia, which shows that the success of digital services depends on the interplay between technology, organisational capacity, and user support (Nabawi et al., 2026; Pribadi et al., 2024).

Significance and Contribution of the Study

Overall, SIMPEL cannot be regarded as a failed innovation. It has delivered online applications, reduced the time and cost of licensing, and provided various supporting features. Its achievements fall short of expectations, however, because of obstacles in outreach, staff capacity, facilities, and adjustment to the national licensing system. The success of service innovation should therefore be measured not by the existence of an application, but by how far technology meets citizens' needs and improves service quality (Twizeyimana & Andersson, 2019). Government digitalisation must not stop at converting manual processes into electronic ones; it must produce services that are easier to use and more beneficial for citizens (Mergel et al., 2019).

Academically, this study connects the philosophy of administrative science with public governance in analysing an electronic service innovation in local government. Ontology is used to understand the core purpose of service, epistemology to assess the information and evidence used to judge success, and axiology to explain the values and benefits to be realised for citizens. Using the three perspectives together helps explain the gap between the aims of an innovation and the conditions of its implementation. On this basis, SIMPEL can be improved through more regular outreach, continuous staff development, better facilities and systems, and evaluation that takes account of users' experience and numbers, so that local innovation supports government that is open, effective, fair, and responsive to citizens' needs.

CONCLUSION

The analysis shows that SIMPEL at the DPMPTSP of Bone Regency has helped citizens obtain permits, particularly through online applications and the *Jemari Perak* service. Its implementation remains suboptimal, however, because information has not reached all citizens, staff competencies need strengthening, supporting facilities are limited, and the system has had to adjust to national licensing policy. From the perspective of the philosophy of administrative science, ontology concerns the nature of government service to citizens, epistemology stresses the need for a sound evidence base to judge success, and axiology concerns the values of benefit, justice, and transparency. The success of public service innovation therefore depends not only on technology but also on institutional readiness and government's capacity to serve according to citizens' needs.

Local government should expand outreach, develop staff competencies, improve facilities

and infrastructure, and evaluate SIMPEL regularly. This study is limited by its reliance on a literature review and previous research, so it cannot directly capture the experiences of citizens and officers using SIMPEL. Future research should collect primary data through observation and interviews with DPMPTSP staff and service users to gain a fuller understanding of the implementation and benefits of the innovation.

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