

Assessing the importance of school administration (administrative staff) in elementary schools

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to examine the importance of school administration through the role of administrative staff (Tata Usaha) in elementary schools, using a qualitative approach based on a literature review of academic studies, scientific books, and the latest educational policies. The findings indicate that administrative staff play a crucial role in ensuring the smooth operation of educational management processes, from student data management, financial documentation, and academic archiving to internal coordination. Despite its strategic function, this role is often overlooked, especially in many public elementary schools in Indonesia that do not yet have official administrative staff positions. The absence of this role has led to the administrative burden being shifted to teachers and principals, thereby diverting their focus from core instructional duties. A well-functioning school administration enhances institutional efficiency, supports data-driven decision-making, and strengthens public accountability in education funding. However, challenges such as the lack of structural recognition for the administrative role at the elementary level, minimal professional training, and inadequate regulatory frameworks remain major obstacles. Therefore, the institutionalization of administrative staff in elementary schools must be promptly realized through affirmative policies, continuous competency development, and a paradigm shift towards a more professional school management system. This study concludes that administrative staff are not merely technical support personnel but strategic actors in building an accountable, orderly, and sustainable basic education system. The presence of administrative staff in elementary schools is not an option but a necessity for the delivery of quality basic education services.

Keywords: school administration, administrative staff, elementary education, educational management, education policy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

School administration is a fundamental aspect of creating an orderly, efficient, and accountable educational system. School administration is a fundamental aspect of creating an orderly, efficient, and accountable educational system. Behind the success of delivering quality education lies an administrative system capable of supporting every process, from planning and implementation to evaluating educational programs. In the context of basic education, school administration should serve as the primary foundation for ensuring that learning activities proceed according to the established goals (Bafadal, 2021). However, the reality on the ground shows that the strategic role of administration—particularly through the presence of administrative staff Tata Usaha (TU) has not received adequate attention in public elementary schools in Indonesia.

Effective school management is a complex endeavor that requires a delicate balance between pedagogical leadership and operational efficiency. While the spotlight often shines on teachers and their instructional practices, a school's seamless functioning heavily relies on a robust administrative backbone. This administrative framework encompasses a wide array of non-teaching activities essential for creating a conducive learning environment. These tasks range from managing student records and financial accounts to ensuring compliance with educational policies and facilitating communication among the stakeholders. In many educational systems worldwide, these critical functions are handled by a dedicated team of administrative professionals. However, this is often not the case in Indonesian elementary schools.

Field conditions reveal that many elementary schools, especially in underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost (3T) regions, lack formally assigned administrative staff. Administrative functions, such as recording student data, financial reporting, archiving official correspondence, and managing the Basic Education Data (Dapodik) system, are often burdened upon teachers or principals. This additional workload not only consumes time but also diverts their focus from their primary functions of teaching and leading the school (Juhaidi, 2020). This ad hoc approach to school administration has far-reaching consequences, impacting not only the well-being of educators but also the overall quality of education delivered. When teachers are bogged down by administrative tasks, their ability to plan and deliver engaging lessons is compromised. Similarly, when principals are preoccupied with operational details, their capacity for strategic leadership and instructional supervision diminishes (Triwiyanto & Kusumaningrum, 2024).

The role of administrative staff is crucial in creating a strong school-based management (SBM) system. With the autonomy granted through SBM policies, schools require a professional administrative structure that can systematically manage information. Good administration enables principals to make data-driven decisions, strengthens public accountability, and supports transparency in the management of educational funds like BOS (School Operational Assistance) (Ridloah et al., 2024). The decentralization of educational governance, a global trend aimed at enhancing school effectiveness, is predicated on the assumption that schools have the capacity to manage their own affairs. However, without the requisite administrative support, this autonomy can become a double-edged sword, leading to mismanagement and failure to achieve desired educational outcomes (Minister of Education and Culture Regulation No. 8 of 2020).

Unfortunately, there is currently no specific policy mandating the formal placement of administrative staff in elementary schools. Although Minister of National Education Regulation No. 24 of 2008 mentions administrative personnel as part of the school structure, its implementation is largely limited to the secondary education level, such as junior and senior high schools. Consequently, elementary schools are left to operate with unprofessional and makeshift administrative support (Minister of National Education Regulation, 2008). This policy gap creates a significant disparity between the administrative capacities of elementary and secondary schools, putting the former at a distinct disadvantage. The foundational years of a child's education are arguably the most critical, and lack of adequate administrative support at this level can have a lasting negative impact on their educational journey (Affandi & Amrullah, 2022).

The presence of administrative staff is crucial for improving the quality of educational services. Orderly and efficient administration allows teachers to work without being burdened by technical and administrative tasks. Furthermore, administrative staff function as managers of vital school information, such as student data, teacher attendance, inventory, and academic archives. In the context of school modernization, their role becomes even more critical as it involves managing digital education systems such as ARKAS, e-Rapor, and Dapodik, which demand specialized competencies (Ningsih & Asy'ari, 2024; Chidayatiningsih & Bafadal, 2025). The digital transformation of education is rapidly changing the school management landscape. The ability to effectively utilize digital tools and platforms is no longer a luxury but a necessity in modern schools. Without dedicated administrative staff possessing requisite digital literacy, elementary schools will struggle to keep pace with these changes, further widening the digital divide in education.

The absence of a career path and professional development system for administrative staff in elementary schools exacerbates the situation. They are often treated as informal staff, without clear job descriptions or competency development. Unlike teachers, who have certification systems, training, and career paths, administrative staff are still positioned as optional support elements. This creates a structural gap in the basic education system (Azis, 2023; Lailiya & Fitriatin, 2025). The lack of professional recognition and opportunities for advancement can lead to low morale and high turnover among those who informally take on administrative roles. This, in turn, can disrupt the continuity of school operations and hinder the development of an institutional memory.

Functionally, administrative staff do not only handle documents but also facilitate coordination among school members, parents, and external parties. In the context of public service, they are the initial representatives of professional and transparent school governance. When administrative staff perform their duties optimally, public trust in educational institutions increases (Susanto & Syafruddin, 2025). Schools are not only educational institutions but also community hubs. Administrative staff often serve as the first point of contact for parents and other community members. Their professionalism and efficiency can significantly shape the public perception of the school and foster a sense of partnership between the school and the community.

Therefore, a reformulation of policies and implementation strategies that are more affirmative towards the position of administrative staff in elementary schools is necessary. These policies include the formal appointment of administrative staff, establishment of an administrative career path, provision of IT-based competency training, and a clear and proportional division of administrative tasks. This step will not only strengthen the school's managerial system but also alleviate the burden on teachers and enhance the principal's focus on transformational leadership (Andriyan & Yoenanto, 2022). A proactive and systemic approach is required to address this long-standing issue. The time has come to move beyond the makeshift arrangements of the past and embrace a more professional and sustainable model of school administration.

Based on this background, this study is important for highlighting the urgency of having administrative staff in elementary schools not just as a complementary element but as an integral part of a professional and high-quality education system. Through a literature review approach, this paper aims to provide enlightenment and foster awareness among policymakers, educators, and the wider community that administrative staff in elementary schools are a systemic necessity and not merely an administrative choice. This study contributes to the growing body of literature calling for a re-evaluation of the role of administrative staff in schools. By synthesizing existing research and policy documents, this study aims to build a compelling case for the professionalization of school administration at the elementary level.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review design. This approach was chosen because the main objective of this study is to deeply understand the role and urgency of administrative staff in elementary schools based on evolving theories, previous research findings, and applicable

government regulations or policies. A literature review provides broad analytical space for various scientific perspectives within the context of basic education administration.

Data for this study were sourced from accredited national and international scientific journals, academic books, and official policy documents from the Indonesian government, such as Ministerial Regulations and the Law on the National Education System. Journal articles were obtained from databases such as Google Scholar, GARUDA, ERIC, ResearchGate, and official educational institution websites. The scientific books used are nationally recognized works published between 2020 and 2025. The data collection process involved identifying relevant literature using keywords such as "school administration," "administrative staff," "elementary school management," and "quality of basic education." The selected literature was then critically reviewed to identify key points related to the functions of administrative staff, administrative implementation challenges, policy solutions, and best practices.

Data analysis was conducted thematically by grouping information based on major issues, such as the structural role of administrative staff, professionalism of administrative personnel, contributions to educational quality, and the context of educational policy in Indonesia. This approach allows the researcher to construct a comprehensive synthesis that not only explains the phenomenon but also provides recommendations based on the data and scientific practice. The validity of the data in this literature review was strengthened by source triangulation, which involves comparing and confirming findings from various types of sources (journals, books, and official policies). Furthermore, all references used met the criteria of being current and relevant to the research topic. Thus, the results of this study are expected to provide a conceptual and practical foundation for developing the elementary school administration system in Indonesia.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

School administration is the backbone of effective educational governance, and the presence of administrative staff (TU) is a strategic element within it. In the context of elementary schools (SD), the presence of TU is often considered less important or even entirely omitted from the school's organizational structure. This contrasts sharply with the situation at the secondary education level, which generally has formal TU personnel. This disparity in administrative support between primary and secondary education is a critical issue that has been largely overlooked in policy discussions. The foundational importance of primary education necessitates that it receives at least the same level of administrative support as secondary education, if not more.

In many public elementary schools in Indonesia, administrative functions such as student data entry, BOS fund reporting, correspondence, and inventory data collection are often assigned to teachers or principals. This non-pedagogical workload interferes with teachers' primary focus on educating and reduces the effectiveness of the principal as an educational manager (Juhaidi, 2020). This practice of assigning administrative tasks to teaching staff is not only inefficient but also detrimental to education quality. Teachers are trained to be educators rather than administrators. By burdening them with tasks for which they are not trained, we are not only misusing their valuable time and expertise but also setting them up for failure. The result is a lose-lose situation where neither the teaching nor the administrative functions are performed effectively (Triwiyanto & Kusumaningrum, 2024).

The absence of formal administrative staff causes the elementary school administration system to run inefficiently and temporarily. However, the TU plays a vital role in maintaining the order of school management, such as document archiving, student data management, attendance tracking, and distribution of official documents. Without a well-organized administrative system, all school components face difficulties in performing their primary functions. Teachers become overwhelmed with managing BOS financial reports, principals lose strategic time for formulating school programs, and the school committee finds it difficult to access accurate data on school progress (Bafadal, 2021). The ad hoc nature of the current system means that there is no consistency or continuity in how administrative tasks are performed. This can lead to a host of problems, including lost documents, inaccurate records, and a general state of administrative chaos (Rifa'i et al., 2023).

In the era of school-based management (SBM), the presence of administrative staff is highly urgent, as schools have autonomy in resource management. The TU acts as the manager of the strategic data needed by the principal for evidence-based decision making. Without a competent TU, data cannot be managed properly, and school autonomy becomes a slogan without substance. The promise of SBM can only be realized if schools have the capacity to manage their affairs effectively. This requires not only pedagogical leadership but also strong administrative management skills. Without the latter, the former is severely handicapped.

This is exacerbated by the lack of structured professional training or development for elementary school administrative staff, unlike teachers, who have clear programs such as teacher professional education (PPG), continuous professional development (PKB), and a distinct career path (Chidayatiningsih & Bafadal, 2025; Ningsih & Asy'ari, 2024). The professionalization of teaching has been a major focus of education reform efforts in Indonesia and worldwide. However, the same cannot be said for school administrations. This neglect of the professional development needs of administrative staff has created a significant capacity gap in many schools.

The digital transformation in the Indonesian education system also requires administrative staff to manage various IT-based platforms, such as Dapodik, ARKAS, e-Rapor, and other reporting systems. The absence of TU in elementary schools hampers the smooth running of this reporting, which ultimately affects school funding and accreditation. Many elementary schools struggle to meet reporting deadlines because they do not have personnel who are fully responsible for these applications (Ridloah et al., 2024). The increasing reliance on digital platforms for school management and reporting has made the need for digitally literate administrative staff more urgent. Without such staff, elementary schools risk being left behind in the digital age.

Regulatorily, the position of TU is mentioned in the Minister of National Education Regulation No. 24 of 2008 as part of the school structure. However, in its implementation, this policy has been more widely applied at the junior and senior high school levels. Elementary schools are often neglected, both in terms of budget allocation for TU personnel and in the formulation of civil servant (ASN/PPPK) hiring quotas. Consequently, many elementary schools operate without an adequate administrative foundation (Minister of National Education Regulation, 2008). The gap between policy and practice is a major challenge that must be addressed. Existing regulations provide a legal basis for employing administrative staff in all schools, including elementary schools. What is needed is the political will and financial resources to translate this policy into reality (Minister of Education and Culture Regulation, 2020).

From a professionalism perspective, the role of TU extends far beyond technical tasks. They are also responsible for maintaining work ethics, data confidentiality and smooth internal communication. School administration is the first face of public education. When TU works professionally and with integrity, the school's image as a public institution improves. Conversely, the lack of a TU system leads to disorder, loss of important data, and low public trust in school management (Affandi & Amrullah, 2022). The ethical dimensions of school administration are often overlooked. Administrative staff are entrusted with sensitive information regarding students, staff, and school finances. Therefore, it is essential that they adhere to the highest standards of professionalism and integrity (Susanto & Syafruddin, 2025).

Another challenge is the absence of a functional career path for TU staff in elementary school. Unlike teachers who have promotion and certification systems, TU staff members lack a developmental structure that encourages professionalism and work motivation. Consequently, administrative work in elementary schools is viewed as an additional task with no formal progression or incentive. This creates a structural imbalance that hampers the overall institutional performance (Azis, 2023). The lack of a career path for administrative staff not only demotivates them but also makes it difficult to attract and retain talented individuals in these roles in the future. This is a major obstacle to the professionalization of school administration (Lailiya & Fitriatin, 2025).

To address this situation, systemic government intervention is required. Steps such as the formal appointment of administrative staff in every elementary school, digital-based competency training, and the provision of an administrative career path are urgent policies that must be implemented. Furthermore, principals should be given the authority to allocate the school budget to form a minimal administrative

unit that is capable of managing essential data and documents. This strategy would lighten the burden on teachers and improve the quality of learning because its support processes would run efficiently (Andriyan & Yoenanto, 2022). A multi-pronged approach is required to address this complex problem. This should include policy reforms, capacity-building initiatives, and a shift in the mindset of all stakeholders regarding the importance of school administration.

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that school administration, particularly through administrative staff, plays a vital role in supporting the effectiveness and efficiency of education delivery in elementary schools. Administrative staff are not passive complements to the education system but an active structure that underpins managerial processes, financial reporting, academic documentation, and communication among school stakeholders. In other words, a school's success in achieving its educational goals is highly dependent on the performance and competence of its administrative staff. The role of administrative staff becomes increasingly significant in the era of educational reform and administrative digitalization. They are now required to perform technical administrative functions and act as strategic data managers supporting evidence-based decision-making.

In the context of School-Based Management, a well-organized and professionally managed administrative system is the foundation for creating accountability and transparency in the management of educational units. Therefore, strengthening the function and position of administrative staff in elementary schools is not an option, but an urgent necessity. Given the importance of this role, a systemic approach is needed to enhance the capacity of administrative staff through continuous training, provision of clear career paths, and formal recognition of the education administration profession. The government, school principals, and managers of basic education institutions need to pay more serious attention to developing the quality of administrative staff through policy, budgeting, and institutional strengthening programs. Without professional and integrity-driven administrative management, the quality of basic education cannot develop sustainably and comprehensively.

Ethical Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of research. No human subjects were involved.

Informed Consent Statement

Not applicable. This study relied entirely on secondary data sources.

Authors' Contributions

N, ATA, and GI collaborated on the conceptualization of the research. Specifically, N contributed to the methodology, and together with GI, wrote the original draft. ATA contributed to the review and editing.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Data Availability Statement

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