

# AN ANALYSIS OF TRENDS, METHODS, AND CHALLENGES IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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**Abstract.** *Research in the realm of public administration has been carried out across various parts of the world. One of the main forms of this research is scientific articles, which are very diverse in scope due to their abundance. Understanding trends in the methods used in scientific articles is in itself an interesting topic for research. Of course, in the process of this research, challenges often arise, and there are often questions that remain unanswered. Therefore, this paper aims to analyze topic trends, methods, and challenges, and to identify*

*open questions that still need to be answered in the context of public administration research from 2018 to 2023. Trend analysis was carried out through the literature review method using Google Scholar and Publish or Perish as data sources. The research results show that the most dominant topic in public administration research is public services, which covers 42.86% of the 33 articles found in total. Meanwhile, the most commonly used research method is qualitative, accounting for 60% of these studies. Not all articles mention the challenges they face, but a common difficulty is in determining research samples, which often have limitations related to each research method.*

**Keywords:** *trends; methods; challenges; literature review.*

**Reikšminiai žodžiai:** *tendencijos; metodai; iššūkiai; literatūros apžvalga.*

## Introduction

Modern advances in science and technology cannot be separated from the influence of ancient Greek philosophy (Karim 2014). In those days, the boundaries between philosophy and science were almost invisible. All ways of thinking are referred to as philosophy, which includes science and philosophical thought (Sidabutar and Situmorang 2022). The philosophy of science cannot be separated from the scientific principles that govern scientific processes (Ginting and Situmorang 2008). The scientific approach produces scientifically valid knowledge, with the scientific method being the main key (Fitria 2022). All thinking activities involve the mind's reflection and the examination of material objects (Purwaningrum 2016).

According to Wahana (2016), scientific activities involve all processes related to the universe and its elements that can be observed either directly or indirectly, often using systems and infrastructure, and can be measured. Viewing administration as a field of science shows that it can be studied and taught (Rahman 2017). This is a subject of study that has been the focus of research and teaching, especially in the social, political, and administrative sciences (Arbinata and Warsono 2021). Differences in understanding the research methods used in public administration studies are a significant phenomenon today (Satibi 2023). Although the majority of researchers prefer to use qualitative research methods in public administration studies, some prefer a quantitative approach (Fitrah 2018).

No research specifically examines trends, methodologies, and emerging problems in public administration research. Therefore, the authors felt the need to address this lack of understanding, forming the primary focus of this study. Various methodological approaches have been used in research discussing the science of public administration. With a large number of studies, each faces various challenges that must be identified for future research. Therefore, a literature review is needed to assess these phenomena.

According to Budgen et al. (2007), the systematic literature review method aims to

identify, evaluate, and analyze research results related to certain research problems to provide answers to previously posed research questions. In the past, this method was often practiced in pharmaceutical and medical research. However, in 2007, Barbara Kitchenham introduced this approach to the field of industrial computing. This approach is considered suitable for analyzing research trends over a certain period. In this paper, the research process aims to answer the following questions: (1) How will research patterns in the field of public administration develop from 2018 to 2023?; (2) What methods were most commonly used in public administration research in the 2018–2023 period?; (3) What were the challenges faced in public administration research in the 2018–2023 period?

## Research Methods

To conduct a comprehensive search regarding the analysis of trends, methods, and challenges in public administration research, the researchers utilized the Google Scholar database using the following search terms: qualitative; quantitative; mixed methods; state administration; public administration; and philosophy of science; and supported this with the Publish or Perish application. This search covered the period from 2018 to 2023 and produced 991 articles.

Each database has a different structure for storing relevant content. In this search, dissertations, books, conference abstracts, and reviews were excluded. Efforts were made to eliminate duplicate studies. After that, the titles and abstracts of the collected articles were evaluated separately by three researchers using the inclusion criteria. If a study was not available in full-text form, an attempt was made to obtain it through direct contact with the author. However, if access to the full text was not possible or there was no response from the authors, the study was discarded. The full texts of articles that met the inclusion criteria were then further evaluated.

To select and include only studies relevant to our research topic, we established specific inclusion and criteria as follows.

Inclusion criteria:

- IC1: Journal article
- IC2: Written in Indonesian or English
- IC3: Peer reviewed
- IC4: Not registered in any other database
- IC5: Research conducted in the field of public administration
- IC6: Indexed by accredited national journal databases
- IC7: Full text available

The criteria for this research included publications that discuss trends, methodologies, and issues in public administration research. After defining search terms and inclusion criteria, we conducted a comprehensive search to find relevant articles for the 2018–2023

period. The decision to choose this time period was based on the consideration that at that time, trends, methodologies, and issues in public administration research were hotly debated.

### Study quality assessment

Three reviewers (JA, IY, and JY) evaluated possible bias in the included studies and reached an agreement on their assessments. Appropriateness of study design, recruitment methods, response rate, sample representativeness, objectivity/reliability of outcome determination, digital availability, and statistical analysis were assessed using the modified Newcastle–Ottawa scale (Modesti et al. 2016; Pahlevan-Sharif et al. 2019). Discrepancies in scores were resolved by mutual agreement, and each study was given a final rating.

### Data extraction

The three reviewers (JA, IY, and JY) independently reviewed the full texts of 991 citations deemed potentially relevant. Important information such as author, year, research methods, research objectives, and general conclusions were extracted. From there, 33 preliminary articles were selected with the help of a research assistant who triangulated the data, coded the articles, and identified recurring patterns among the publications. Relevant information from each article was collected in tables and then classified into appropriate themes. This research adopted a grounded theory methodology, through which a table containing descriptions of the studies reviewed was created.

**Table 1.** Description of studies reviewed

Author and Year	Method	Topic	Accreditation
Ahluwalia (2020)	Quantitative	Human Resource Management	Sinta 4
Bahri and Arafah (2020)	Qualitative	Human Resource Management	Sinta 4
Nurkholis et al. (2021)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 4
Hidayah (2020)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 4
Yunaningsih et al. (2021)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 3
Salam (2021)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 4
Kusnendar (2018)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 4
Hajar et al. (2021)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 6

Habibie (2019)	Literature Review	Public Service	Sinta 4
Herizal et al. (2020)	Literature Review	Public Service	Sinta 4
Hadi et al. (2020)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 2
Bisri & Asmoro (2019)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 4
Adawiyah (2018)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 4
Deni (2018)	Quantitative	Public Service	Sinta 3
Antoni et al. (2021)	Qualitative	Public Service	Sinta 3
Indah & Hariyanti (2018)	Qualitative	Public Policy	Sinta 2
Andela Anggleni (2018)	Qualitative	Public Policy	Sinta 5
Herdiana et al. (2021)	Qualitative	Public Policy	Sinta 6
Kurniawan and Maani (2019)	Qualitative	Public Policy	Sinta 4
Puspitasari and Nugroho (2021)	Qualitative	Public Policy	Sinta 4
Fauzi (2020)	Qualitative	Public Policy	Sinta 5
Melati and Asmorowati (2023)	Qualitative	Public Policy	Sinta 4
Lestari et al. (2020)	Quantitative	Public Policy	Sinta 4
Nurfurqon (2020)	Qualitative	Public Policy	Sinta 4
Purwanti et al. (2019)	Quantitative	Public Policy	Sinta 4
Jamaluddin et al. (2019)	Qualitative	Community Empowerment	Sinta 3
Iryana (2018)	Qualitative	Community Empowerment	Sinta 3
Mustanir et al. (2019)	Quantitative	Community Empowerment	Sinta 5
Disemadi and Prananingtyas (2020)	Normative Juridical	Community Empowerment	Sinta 2
Handayani and Suryani (2019)	Quantitative	Quality of Service	Sinta 3
Amhas (2018)	Quantitative	Quality of Service	Sinta 5
Panjaitan et al. (2019)	Qualitative	Quality of Service	Sinta 3
Agustian et al. (2019)	Quantitative	Quality of Service	Sinta 5

## Data analysis

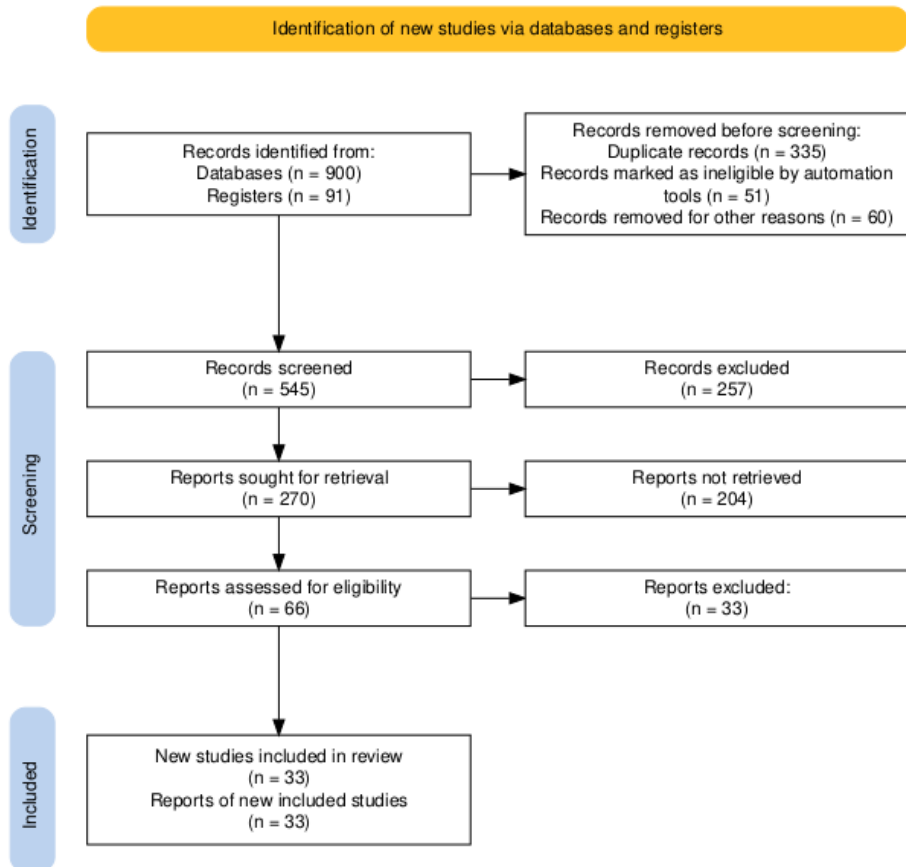
The grounded theory method explores data collected from the literature to formulate research questions and possible theme findings. We first researched the literature without coding and designed our research questions. The grounded theory approach entails a highly involved, open, and interactive process that includes simultaneous data collection, coding (data analysis), and note-taking (theory building) (Gómez-Leal et al. 2022; Groat and Wang 2004).

We began our research by exploring what we already knew or had observed about trends, methodologies, and issues in public administration research. Literature selection was carried out according to the PRISMA criteria. We conducted a literature review and began theoretical sampling, during which the three researchers independently coded the data and agreed on the literature categories. Using analytical induction, we analyzed the data and identified recurring trends across several studies.

This article does not aim to propose theory, but rather to collect and summarize literature that discusses trends, methodologies, and issues in public administration research. The goal is to gain an understanding of the concepts that arise in this topic from various literature sources. By comparing and contrasting the literature using a qualitative approach, we can identify general patterns that explain these ideas. If this research is expanded by future researchers, it may be possible to develop a more integrated theory.

## Search and filtering results

We found a total of 991 references from the Google Scholar database. After removing duplicates, we obtained 66 studies for further analysis. Of these 66 studies, only 33 were selected for further evaluation considering the established inclusion criteria, and ultimately these 33 studies were included in our review. Disagreements between reviewers were resolved by reaching consensus. The search and item selection process was carried out by the guidelines provided by PRISMA and is shown in Figure 1.



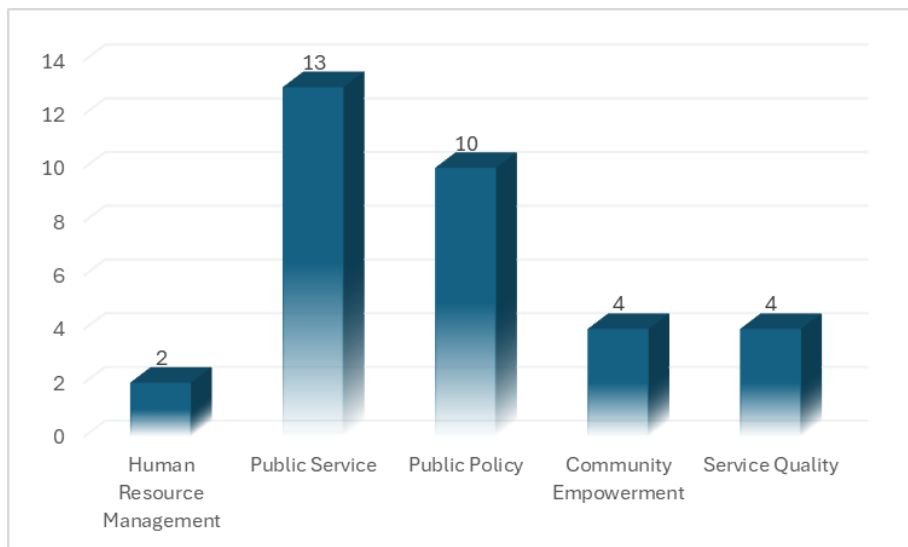
**Figure 1.** PRISMA 2024 flow diagram

Source: Haddaway et al. (2022)

## Analysis and Results

### Research trends that occurred in the field of public administration from 2018–2023

In this systematic review, 33 journals examine trends, methodologies, and issues in public administration research. Every year between 2018 and 2023, several journals discussed research trends in public administration. The dominant research trend in public administration during this period was the topic of human resource management, followed by research on public services. Figure 2 also visualizes research trends in the field of public administration from 2018 to 2023.



**Figure 2.** Public administration research trends, 2018–2023

From Figure 2 it can be seen that topics with public service trends dominate compared to other research topics. This is because in the last 5 years, public services have become the government's main focus in providing good services to the community. According to Jamaluddin (2016), public services are provided by a public sector institution to achieve a satisfactory level of service quality for all parties and stakeholders involved. Public services are provided as part of the state's obligation to fulfill the basic needs and civil rights of every citizen regarding the goods, services, and administrative services provided by public service institutions (Azan et al. 2021). Additionally, according to Ibrahim et al. (2022), public service trends in the Indonesian bureaucratic structure more often reflect one of three models: bureau pathology, resembling symptoms of a disease and characterized by a large bureaucracy; an Orwellian system, which is highly regulatory and functions as a state tool to control society; or the Jacksonian model, featuring authoritarian bureaucratic patterns. Public services are related to the principles of good governance in meeting community needs related to welfare (Dewi and Tobing 2021). Quality public services and good management are a representation of the state's obligations, which must be recognized by the community as their rights (Dewi et al. 2021). The problem of unsatisfactory public services, with all the complexity of their procedures, is a problem that is external to society and requires supervision from authorities (Septianingtiyaset al. 2020). A guarantee of high-quality public services is provided to achieve the goals of the welfare state.

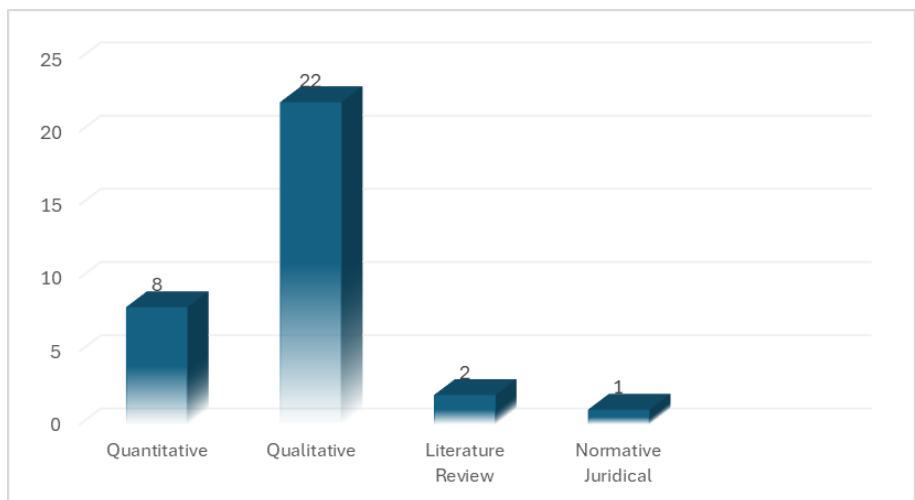
Meanwhile, high-quality human resources (HR) will mean nothing if they are not supported by good public services. On the other hand, good public services will be paralyzed



without the support of qualified HR and good community empowerment (Purnama and Romli 2023). According to Arcana et al. (2021), community empowerment is action aimed at increasing the capacity and independence of individuals or groups to meet their own needs. Through this empowerment, people can be more aware of their potential and overcome various problems they face independently, including solving general problems so as to improve service quality. In this way, public satisfaction with government public services can be achieved. Community satisfaction will be achieved if, after they use a product/service, the needs, wants, and expectations of the community are fulfilled or even exceeded (Permana 2013). Therefore, the lack of research trends regarding HR, community empowerment, and service quality is a good opportunity for future researchers to focus on these areas.

### Methods used in public administration science research in 2018–2023

According to this systematic review, of the 33 articles analyzed, the dominant research method was qualitative, consisting of 21 articles, followed by 9 articles that used quantitative methods, 3 literary reviews, 1 article using the extreme programming method, and 1 the normative juridical approach. The use of qualitative research methods in public administration science is widespread in various publications. However, the role of quantitative methods is also significant in public administration science because they can function as testers for the concepts put forward through qualitative methods. Meanwhile, the literature review, extreme programming, and normative juridical methods are still rarely used in research in the field of public administration.



**Figure 3.** Public administration research methods, 2018–2023

Research methods determine the focus of a study. Based on Figure 3, qualitative research is the most dominant method used by researchers to investigate research trends in public administration science. The number of qualitative studies is greater than that of other types of research, which is in line with several previous studies in which it was reported that researchers prefer qualitative research designs for conducting research in the field of public administration (Goktas et al. 2012; Uzunboylu and Aşiksoy 2014). In addition, quantitative approaches are considered relatively new to public administration research (Sharma 2013). However, the quantitative design trend is gaining ground (Shakouri and Nazari 2014), and has targeted non-social issues, including some related to public administration (Mohajan 2018). Such conditions are closely related to the superiority of a quantitative approach to defining a phenomenon comprehensively and in detail. Therefore, the lack of quantitative research provides a good opportunity for future researchers to use quantitative designs and focus their research on the field of public administration.

### Challenges in public administration research in 2018–2023

When studying public administration, researchers are often faced with several diverse challenges while conducting research. One of the main problems faced is the selection of research samples to be investigated. For example, in research that adopts qualitative methods, the use of samples is often limited to around 10 to 15 respondents. On the other hand, in quantitative methods, much larger samples can be used, usually involving no less than 30 respondents. However, each research approach in public administration, as well as in other scientific disciplines, has several advantages and disadvantages that must be considered carefully. Therefore, the literature review, extreme programming, and normative juridical methods proposed by Creswell and Poth (2016) serve as key tools in structuring the research process, enabling a thorough analysis of existing theories, the iterative development of solutions, and the creation of a legal framework to ensure that the study's findings are grounded in both practical applications and legal standards.

### Conclusion

1. From the results of the research and discussions carried out, it can be concluded that in the 2018–2023 period, the research topic that most dominated the field of public administration was public services, accounting for 42.86% of all topics discussed. In contrast, the most minimally discussed topic was HR, which accounted for only 5.71% of the total discussion.
2. The most commonly used research method in this area is the qualitative method, which is used in 60% of research, while less frequently used methods such as

extreme programming and the normative juridical approach appear in only a low percentage (2.86%) of studies.

3. From 2018 to 2023, the challenges often faced in public administration research were related to research sample selection. In qualitative research, the number of respondents usually ranged from 10 to 15. This shows the importance of paying attention to the sample selection process so that research results can be representative and reliable.

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Amud Sunarya, Florentina Ratih Wulandari, Vivi Indra Amelia, Eha Saleha

## VIEŠOJO ADMINISTRAVIMO LAUKO TYRIMŲ TENDENCIJŲ, METODŲ IR IŠŠŪKIŲ ANALIZĖ: LITERATŪROS APŽVALGA

Anotacija. Viešojo administravimo mokslo srities tyrimai buvo plačiai atliekami įvairiose pasaulio vietose. Vienas pagrindinių šio tyrimo rezultatų – mokslinių straipsnių analizė, kurių tematika dėl gausaus šių straipsnių skaičiaus yra labai įvairi. Moksliniuose straipsniuose pasitelkiamų metodų tendencijų supratimas taip pat yra įdomi tema. Žinoma, atliekant šį tyrimą dažnai išskyla iššūkių, dažnai lieka neatsakytų klausimų. Todėl šiuo tyrimu siekiama išanalizuoti temų tendencijas, metodus ir iššūkius bei nustatyti atvirus klausimus, į kuriuos dar reikia atsakyti viešojo administravimo mokslo tyrimuose 2018–2023 m. Tendencijų analizė atlikta literatūros apžvalgos metodu, kaip duomenų šaltinį naudojant „Google Scholar“ ir „Publish or Perish“. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, kad viešojo administravimo tyrimuose vyraujanti viešųjų paslaugų tema (42,86 proc. visų rastų 33 straipsnių). O dažniausiai taikomas kokybinis tyrimo metodas (60 proc.). Ne visuose straipsniuose minimi iššūkiai, su kuriais susiduriama, tačiau bendras iššūkis yra nustatyti tyrimo imtis, nes kiekvienas tyrimo metodas dažnai turi apribojimų.

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