Review Article

Administrative Capacity in Consular Services: A Literature Review on Institutional Readiness in Serving Indonesian Migrant Workers

Agussalim [1], Amirul Mustofa [2]*, Sarwani [3], and Dian Ferriswara [4]

[1] Prodi Ilmu Administrasi Jenjang S2, Fakultas Ilmu Administrasi, Universitas Dr. Soetomo Surabaya, Indonesia, Email: agussalim150479@gmail.com

[2] Prodi Ilmu Administrasi Jenjang S2, Fakultas Ilmu Administrasi, Universitas Dr. Soetomo Surabaya, Indonesia, Email: amirul.mustofa@unitomo.ac.id

[3] Prodi Ilmu Administrasi Jenjang S2, Fakultas Ilmu Administrasi, Universitas Dr. Soetomo Surabaya, Indonesia, Email: sarwani@unitomo.ac.id

[4] Prodi Ilmu Administrasi Jenjang S2, Fakultas Ilmu Administrasi, Universitas Dr. Soetomo Surabaya, Indonesia, Email: dianferriswara@unitomo.ac.id

* Corresponding Author: amirul.mustofa@unitomo.ac.id

Abstract: Consular services have become a critical site of state intervention in the governance of international labor migration, particularly for migrant-sending countries such as Indonesia whose citizens depend on overseas missions for administrative protection and access to public services abroad. Despite the growing importance of consular institutions in safeguarding migrant workers' rights and welfare, existing scholarship remains fragmented, offering limited conceptual integration of how administrative capacity shapes institutional readiness in cross-border public service delivery. Addressing this gap, this article presents a structured narrative–integrative literature review that synthesizes international peer-reviewed studies on administrative capacity, policy capacity, consular services, and migrant worker protection published in the last five years. Drawing on Administrative Capacity Theory as the core framework, complemented by Public Service Theory, Policy Implementation Theory, Street-Level Bureaucracy, and Institutional Theory, the review systematically analyzes how different dimensions of capacity configure institutional readiness in consular services. The findings reveal that institutional readiness emerges from the interaction of four interrelated dimensions: human resource capacity, organizational and procedural capacity, institutional and coordination capacity, and resource and infrastructure capacity. Rather than functioning as isolated determinants, these dimensions collectively shape how consular institutions translate formal mandates into service outcomes under conditions of transnational governance, legal pluralism, and fluctuating demand. The review further demonstrates that frontline discretion, coordination gaps, procedural rigidity, and uneven resource allocation are recurrent patterns across the literature, underscoring the dynamic and practice-based nature of administrative capacity in consular contexts.

Keywords: Administrative Capacity; Consular Services; Institutional Readiness; Migrant Worker Protection; Public Administration.

1. Introduction

The growing scale and complexity of international labor migration have placed consular services at the forefront of state responsibility in protecting citizens abroad. For labor-sending countries such as Indonesia, migrant workers are not only economic actors but also subjects of public administration whose rights, legal status, and welfare depend heavily on the effectiveness of overseas consular institutions. Indonesian migrant workers frequently rely on consular services for passport issuance and renewal, legal assistance, repatriation, and administrative protection in host

countries. These services are delivered under conditions characterized by cross-border jurisdictional constraints, high caseloads, legal pluralism, and socio-economic vulnerability of service users. As global migration intensifies and crises such as pandemics, labor exploitation, and irregular migration persist, consular institutions increasingly function as frontline public service providers operating beyond national territory. Consequently, the capacity of consular institutions to deliver reliable, timely, and equitable administrative services has become a critical issue in contemporary public administration and governance research (Haque et al., 2021; McDermid et al., 2022).

Within public administration scholarship, the concept of administrative capacity has been widely employed to explain variations in state performance, policy implementation, and service delivery outcomes. Drawing from state capacity and institutional capacity traditions, scholars have emphasized that effective public service delivery depends not only on legal mandates but also on organizational resources, human competencies, coordination mechanisms, and institutional arrangements. Seminal contributions by Merilee S. Grindle conceptualize administrative capacity as a core component of state capacity that enables governments to translate policy intent into operational outcomes. More recently, the policy capacity framework developed by Michael Howlett and Xun Wu has refined this perspective by distinguishing analytical, operational, and political dimensions of capacity across individual, organizational, and systemic levels. While these frameworks have been applied extensively in domestic policy sectors such as health, education, and social protection, their application to consular services and cross-border public administration remains relatively underdeveloped (Brenton, 2023; Saddi et al., 2023).

Existing studies on consular services and migrant protection tend to focus on legal frameworks, diplomatic practices, or crisis response mechanisms, particularly during emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Comparative analyses of consular assistance have highlighted issues of duty of care, emergency repatriation, and intergovernmental coordination, demonstrating that consular performance varies significantly across countries and contexts (Birka et al., 2022; Csatlós, 2022). However, much of this literature remains descriptive and institutionally fragmented, often treating consular services as extensions of foreign policy rather than as public service delivery systems embedded in administrative structures. Moreover, studies that do engage with administrative capacity frequently emphasize macro-level state capacity indicators without unpacking how institutional readiness is shaped by organizational processes, frontline discretion, and implementation dynamics within consular offices. As a result, the analytical linkage between administrative capacity theory and the operational realities of consular service delivery for migrant workers remains weakly theorized.

This literature gap is particularly evident in the Indonesian context. Despite the country's long-standing role as a major sender of migrant workers, systematic syntheses of how Indonesian consular institutions build and deploy administrative capacity to serve migrant workers are scarce. Existing research often concentrates on migrant vulnerability, regulatory frameworks, or bilateral agreements, while paying limited attention to the institutional conditions under which consular services are delivered. There is a notable absence of integrative literature reviews that connect administrative capacity theory, policy implementation perspectives, and street-level bureaucratic dynamics to the concept of institutional readiness in consular settings. This gap constrains both theoretical advancement and evidence-based policy learning, as it obscures how capacity constraints and enabling factors interact in shaping service outcomes for migrant workers abroad (Glyniadaki, 2024; Walsh & Ferazzoli, 2025).

Responding to this gap, this article aims to provide a structured narrative–integrative literature review on administrative capacity in consular services, with a specific focus on institutional readiness in serving Indonesian migrant workers. The research problem addressed in this article concerns how administrative capacity has

been conceptualized, operationalized, and empirically examined in relation to consular service delivery and migrant protection. By synthesizing international peer-reviewed literature published within the last five years, this review contributes theoretically by extending administrative capacity and policy capacity frameworks to the domain of cross-border public services. Conceptually, it integrates insights from public service theory, policy implementation theory, street-level bureaucracy, and institutional theory to offer a multidimensional understanding of consular institutional readiness. Practically, the article provides an analytical foundation for strengthening consular institutions as service-oriented administrative organizations rather than solely diplomatic entities.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the theoretical foundations and related literature on administrative capacity and consular service delivery. This is followed by the Materials and Method section, which outlines the design and procedures of the literature review. The Results section presents the thematic synthesis of the selected literature based on key dimensions of administrative capacity. The Discussion interprets these findings through the lens of administrative capacity and institutional readiness. A comparative section situates the findings within the broader state-of-the-art literature, and the article concludes by summarizing key insights, theoretical contributions, policy implications, and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

Administrative Capacity Theory as the Core Conceptual Framework

Administrative capacity has long been recognized as a central determinant of state performance and public service delivery. In public administration scholarship, capacity is not merely understood as the existence of formal authority, but as the practical ability of public institutions to translate mandates into effective action. Foundational work by Merilee S. Grindle conceptualizes administrative capacity as a core component of state capacity, encompassing the skills, organizational arrangements, and institutional resources required to implement public policies and deliver services. Grindle's framework emphasizes that institutional capacity is context-dependent and shaped by political, organizational, and administrative constraints, making it particularly relevant for institutions operating in complex and resource-constrained environments, such as consular offices serving migrant workers abroad.

Building on this tradition, the policy capacity framework advanced by Michael Howlett and further refined by Xun Wu offers a multidimensional understanding of capacity across analytical, operational, and political domains. Analytical capacity refers to the ability to generate, interpret, and use knowledge for decision-making; operational capacity concerns the organizational and managerial ability to implement policies and deliver services; and political capacity involves coordination, legitimacy, and stakeholder management. This framework has been widely applied in domestic policy sectors such as health, education, and social protection (Brenton, 2023; Saddi et al., 2023), but its application to cross-border public services and consular administration remains limited. In the context of consular services, these dimensions are particularly salient, as consular institutions must simultaneously interpret complex regulations, manage high-volume service delivery, and coordinate with multiple domestic and international actors under conditions of legal and jurisdictional ambiguity. Recent developments in policy capacity research further emphasize that administrative performance in complex governance settings depends on the interaction between analytical, operational, and political competences across institutional levels (Howlett & Mukherjee, 2022).

Human Resource Capacity in Consular Services

Human resource capacity constitutes a foundational dimension of administrative capacity, particularly in service-intensive public organizations. The literature consistently highlights that the effectiveness of public service delivery depends on the availability, competence, and professionalism of frontline personnel. In consular settings, human resource challenges are often exacerbated by high caseloads, limited staffing, and the need for specialized knowledge related to immigration law, labor protection, and crisis management. Studies grounded in policy capacity and public management literature suggest that insufficient staffing levels and uneven skill distribution undermine operational capacity and contribute to service delays and inconsistent outcomes (Haque et al., 2021; Brenton, 2023).

Empirical research on migration-related public services further demonstrates that frontline officials frequently operate under intense pressure, balancing procedural requirements with humanitarian considerations. In such contexts, professional competence alone is insufficient; adaptive skills, emotional labor, and ethical judgment become critical components of human resource capacity. While existing studies acknowledge these challenges, they often treat human resources as static inputs rather than dynamic elements shaped by institutional incentives, training systems, and organizational cultures. Moreover, much of the literature focuses on domestic migration agencies, with limited attention to consular officials who operate outside national territory and face additional constraints related to host-country regulations and diplomatic protocols. This gap limits the explanatory power of current models when applied to consular services for migrant workers.

Organizational and Procedural Capacity

Organizational and procedural capacity refers to the internal arrangements that structure how public services are delivered, including organizational design, standard operating procedures (SOPs), workflow management, and accountability mechanisms. The literature emphasizes that clear procedures and well-defined organizational roles are essential for ensuring consistency, transparency, and fairness in public service delivery. In consular institutions, procedural capacity is particularly important due to the standardized nature of services such as passport issuance, legal documentation, and administrative verification, which require adherence to both domestic regulations and international norms.

However, comparative studies of consular administration indicate significant variation in organizational practices across countries and missions. Research on consular responses during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrates how procedural rigidity often hindered timely service delivery, while more flexible organizational arrangements enabled rapid adaptation to emergency conditions (McDermid et al., 2022; Birka et al., 2022). These findings suggest that procedural capacity should not be equated with procedural rigidity; rather, effective administrative capacity involves the ability to balance standardization with adaptability. Despite these insights, existing studies rarely connect organizational and procedural arrangements to broader theories of administrative capacity, resulting in fragmented analyses that do not fully capture how internal processes shape institutional readiness in consular services.

Institutional and Coordination Capacity

Institutional and coordination capacity encompasses the ability of public organizations to work effectively across institutional boundaries, including coordination with other government agencies, international organizations, and non-state actors. In the context of consular services for migrant workers, coordination is inherently complex, involving ministries of foreign affairs, labor agencies, immigration authorities, and host-country institutions. The policy capacity literature underscores that weak coordination undermines both analytical and operational

capacity, leading to policy incoherence and service fragmentation (Howlett & Wu, 2018).

Empirical studies on migrant protection highlight that failures in inter-agency coordination often result in delayed responses to worker grievances, inconsistent application of regulations, and gaps in service coverage (Csatlós, 2022). While these studies acknowledge coordination challenges, they tend to focus on formal institutional arrangements rather than the informal practices and relational dynamics that shape coordination in practice. Moreover, coordination capacity is frequently analyzed at the national level, with limited attention to how consular offices navigate multi-level governance structures and transnational networks. This limitation is particularly relevant for Indonesian consular services, which must align domestic policy objectives with host-country legal frameworks while responding to the immediate needs of migrant workers.

Resource and Infrastructure Capacity

Resource and infrastructure capacity refers to the financial, material, and technological resources that enable public organizations to perform their functions. The literature consistently identifies resource constraints as a major barrier to effective service delivery, particularly in overseas missions that operate with fixed budgets and limited physical infrastructure. Studies on state capacity suggest that resource availability alone does not guarantee performance; rather, the allocation and management of resources are equally important (Haque et al., 2021).

In consular contexts, infrastructure capacity includes not only physical facilities but also information systems that support service delivery and coordination. Research on consular digitalization during crises demonstrates that missions with more advanced information systems were better able to manage service backlogs and communicate with citizens abroad (McDermid et al., 2022). However, the literature often treats infrastructure as a technical variable, without integrating it into broader analyses of administrative capacity and institutional readiness. This narrow focus obscures the interaction between resources, organizational practices, and human capacities that collectively shape service outcomes.

Integrating Supporting Theories: Enriching the Analysis of Administrative Capacity

To capture the complexity of consular services for migrant workers, administrative capacity theory must be complemented by additional theoretical lenses. Public Service Theory provides a normative foundation by framing consular services as expressions of the state's obligation to serve and protect citizens, regardless of their location. This perspective shifts the analysis from diplomatic discretion to service accountability and citizen-oriented performance.

Policy Implementation Theory further enriches the analysis by highlighting the gap between policy design and practice. Top-down approaches emphasize formal rules and hierarchical control, while bottom-up perspectives draw attention to the role of frontline actors in shaping implementation outcomes. In consular settings, this tension is particularly pronounced, as policies formulated at the national level are implemented in diverse local and international contexts.

The theory of street-level bureaucracy, developed by Michael Lipsky, offers critical insights into how frontline consular officials exercise discretion under conditions of resource scarcity and high demand. Empirical studies on migration policy implementation demonstrate that such discretion can both mitigate and exacerbate institutional capacity constraints (Glyniadaki, 2024; Walsh & Ferazzoli, 2025). Finally, institutional theory underscores the role of formal rules, norms, and organizational cultures in shaping administrative behavior, providing a macro-level context for understanding capacity development and institutional readiness.

Conceptual Synthesis and Literature Gap

Taken together, the reviewed literature demonstrates that administrative capacity is a multidimensional construct shaped by human resources, organizational procedures, institutional coordination, and resource infrastructure. While these dimensions have been examined in various policy domains, their application to consular services for migrant workers remains fragmented and theoretically underdeveloped. Existing studies tend to focus on individual dimensions or specific crises, without offering an integrated conceptual synthesis that captures institutional readiness as a dynamic and context-dependent phenomenon.

Notably, there is a lack of comprehensive literature reviews that explicitly link administrative capacity theory with empirical studies of consular service delivery in migrant-sending countries such as Indonesia. This gap limits the ability of scholars and practitioners to identify systemic capacity constraints and enabling factors across institutional levels. Addressing this gap requires a structured synthesis that integrates core administrative capacity frameworks with supporting theories of public service, policy implementation, street-level bureaucracy, and institutional analysis. The present article responds to this need by systematically reviewing and synthesizing international literature to develop a coherent conceptual understanding of institutional readiness in consular services. This synthesis provides the analytical foundation for the subsequent Materials and Method section and informs the thematic analysis presented in the Results and Discussion sections.

3. Materials and Method

Type and Design of the Literature Review

This study adopts a structured narrative–integrative literature review design. The review is neither a quantitative systematic review nor a meta-analysis, but rather a conceptually driven synthesis aimed at integrating theoretical and empirical insights on administrative capacity and institutional readiness in consular services for migrant workers. This approach is appropriate for research questions that seek to clarify concepts, frameworks, and patterns across heterogeneous studies, particularly in public administration and policy research where institutional contexts, governance arrangements, and service delivery mechanisms vary widely. The narrative–integrative design allows for critical interpretation and cross-theoretical synthesis, enabling the examination of how administrative capacity has been conceptualized and operationalized in studies of public service delivery abroad and migrant worker protection.

Data Sources and Literature Corpus

The data analyzed in this review consist exclusively of peer-reviewed journal articles and international proceedings that have been pre-selected and consolidated into the Pustaka Agus Pool. This corpus was compiled from major academic databases and publishers, including Scopus, Web of Science, DOAJ, and reputable international journal publishers. All included studies are scholarly publications subject to peer review and provide full-text access.

No additional substantive empirical sources were added beyond this corpus. However, a limited number of methodological references were consulted to justify the literature review design and analytical techniques (e.g., narrative–integrative review and thematic analysis). These methodological sources were used solely for design justification and do not form part of the analytical dataset.

Time Frame and Justification

The literature corpus is restricted to publications from the last five years (2021–2025). This time frame was selected to ensure the relevance, timeliness, and

conceptual currency of the review, particularly in light of recent global developments affecting consular services and migrant worker protection, including increased labor mobility, institutional reforms, and crisis-driven service delivery challenges. Focusing on recent literature also captures the latest theoretical refinements in administrative capacity and policy capacity frameworks, which are essential for assessing contemporary institutional readiness.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure analytical rigor and consistency.

Inclusion criteria:
1) Peer-reviewed journal articles or international conference proceedings.
2) Direct relevance to at least one of the following themes: administrative capacity, policy capacity, institutional capacity, consular services, public service delivery abroad, or migrant worker protection.
3) Availability of full-text articles.
4) Presence of a valid DOI or official publisher URL enabling academic traceability.
5) Publication within the defined time frame (2021–2025).

Exclusion criteria:
1) Non-academic publications such as policy briefs, reports, opinion pieces, or blog posts.
2) Articles lacking clear methodological or theoretical grounding.
3) Publications without verifiable metadata (e.g., missing DOI/URL).
4) Studies unrelated to public administration, governance, or public service delivery contexts.

Literature Identification and Selection Process

The literature selection process followed a three-stage screening procedure to enhance transparency and replicability:
1) Title screening was conducted to identify publications aligned with the core themes of administrative capacity, consular services, and migrant worker protection.
2) Abstract screening was then applied to assess theoretical relevance, conceptual focus, and potential contribution to understanding institutional readiness.
3) Full-text review was undertaken to confirm analytical relevance and to extract conceptual and empirical insights related to administrative capacity dimensions.

Only articles meeting all inclusion criteria at each stage were retained for analysis. This structured screening process ensured that the final corpus was thematically coherent and theoretically relevant.

Analytical Techniques: Thematic Analysis and Conceptual Synthesis

The analysis employed a combination of thematic analysis and conceptual synthesis. First, the selected literature was coded inductively and deductively to identify recurring concepts, patterns, and explanatory mechanisms related to administrative capacity. The coding process was guided by the core theoretical

framework of Administrative Capacity Theory and the Policy Capacity Framework, while remaining open to emergent themes from the data.

Second, the coded material was organized into four analytical dimensions of administrative capacity:

1) Human Resource Capacity (competence, staffing levels, workload, and professionalism);
2) Organizational and Procedural Capacity (organizational structures, standard operating procedures, and internal workflows);
3) Institutional and Coordination Capacity (inter-agency coordination, multi-level governance, and cross-border institutional linkages);
4) Resource and Infrastructure Capacity (financial resources, facilities, and supporting systems).

Supporting theories—Public Service Theory, Policy Implementation Theory, Street-Level Bureaucracy, and Institutional Theory—were applied as interpretive lenses to deepen the analysis and explain variations across contexts.

Ensuring Rigor, Consistency, and Academic Traceability

Several strategies were employed to maintain rigor and transparency throughout the review process. First, all citations and references were managed using APA 7th edition, ensuring consistency between in-text citations and the reference list. Second, all sources were verified for academic credibility through DOI or official publisher URLs. Third, terminological consistency was maintained across sections to ensure conceptual clarity and coherence.

Finally, the methodological design was explicitly aligned with the subsequent Results and Discussion section. The analytical dimensions defined in this section directly structure the presentation of findings, while the theoretical frameworks introduced here provide the basis for interpretation and discussion. This alignment ensures a clear and traceable link between research design, analytical process, and substantive conclusions.

4. Results and Discussion

Results

Human Resource Capacity in Consular Services

The literature consistently identifies human resource capacity as a critical determinant of administrative performance in consular services, particularly in contexts involving migrant worker protection. Across studies, frontline consular officials are described as operating under conditions of high service demand, complex regulatory requirements, and limited staffing levels. Empirical research indicates that insufficient personnel numbers and uneven staff distribution across overseas missions frequently result in excessive workloads, service backlogs, and constrained responsiveness, especially in high-migration corridors (Haque et al., 2021; McDermid et al., 2022). In addition to quantitative shortages, the literature highlights qualitative challenges related to skill mismatches and limited specialized training in migration law, labor protection, and crisis management. Several studies emphasize that professional competence in consular settings extends beyond administrative skills to include intercultural communication, emotional labor, and adaptive problem-solving abilities (Brenton, 2023).

Comparative findings further suggest variation in how consular systems address human resource constraints. Some studies document the use of task specialization and informal role differentiation to cope with workload pressures, while others report reliance on discretionary practices by individual officers to manage service demand. Despite these adaptive strategies, the literature shows a consistent pattern of

vulnerability in human resource capacity, particularly where institutional support mechanisms such as continuous training, performance management, and psychosocial support are weak. Overall, the literature portrays human resource capacity in consular services as structurally strained, context-dependent, and highly sensitive to fluctuations in migrant populations and crisis situations.

Organizational and Procedural Capacity

Findings from the reviewed literature indicate that organizational and procedural capacity plays a central role in shaping the consistency and reliability of consular service delivery. Studies examining consular administration highlight the importance of clear organizational structures, well-defined standard operating procedures (SOPs), and streamlined service workflows for managing routine administrative functions such as passport issuance, documentation, and legal assistance (Csatlós, 2022). Where procedures are clearly codified and aligned with organizational roles, consular services tend to demonstrate greater procedural consistency and predictability.

However, the literature also reveals recurrent organizational weaknesses. Several studies report that rigid procedural frameworks can limit institutional adaptability, particularly during periods of crisis or sudden increases in service demand. Evidence from pandemic-related consular responses shows that highly centralized decision-making and inflexible procedures often delayed service adjustments, whereas missions with greater procedural discretion were better able to reconfigure service processes (Birka et al., 2022; McDermid et al., 2022). Additionally, inconsistencies between formal procedures and actual practices are frequently observed, with frontline officials adapting workflows informally to meet service demands. Overall, the literature suggests that organizational and procedural capacity in consular services is characterized by a tension between standardization and adaptability, with varying institutional outcomes depending on how this balance is managed.

Institutional and Coordination Capacity

Institutional and coordination capacity emerges in the literature as a persistent challenge in consular service delivery for migrant workers. Studies consistently show that effective consular services depend on coordination across multiple institutions, including ministries of foreign affairs, labor agencies, immigration authorities, and host-country counterparts. The literature documents that weak inter-agency coordination often results in fragmented service delivery, delayed case resolution, and inconsistent application of migrant protection policies (Csatlós, 2022; Haque et al., 2021).

Cross-national and comparative analyses reveal that coordination challenges are compounded by differences in institutional mandates, legal frameworks, and information systems across agencies. In many cases, consular offices operate as intermediaries between domestic institutions and foreign authorities, requiring continuous negotiation and information exchange. Several studies report that coordination mechanisms tend to rely heavily on informal networks and personal relationships rather than formalized institutional arrangements. While such informal coordination can enhance flexibility, the literature also notes its vulnerability to personnel turnover and organizational change. Overall, the findings suggest that institutional and coordination capacity in consular services is unevenly developed and remains a significant source of administrative fragility in migrant worker service provision.

Resource and Infrastructure Capacity

The reviewed literature identifies resource and infrastructure capacity as a foundational, yet often constraining, dimension of administrative capacity in consular

services. Studies consistently report that overseas missions operate under fixed or limited budgets, which restrict their ability to expand service capacity, upgrade facilities, or invest in supporting systems (Haque et al., 2021). Physical infrastructure constraints, such as limited service counters, inadequate waiting areas, and insufficient equipment, are frequently cited as factors contributing to service congestion and reduced service quality.

In addition to physical resources, the literature highlights the growing importance of administrative and information systems as components of infrastructure capacity. Empirical studies indicate that consular missions with more advanced administrative systems and data integration capabilities are better positioned to manage high service volumes and maintain service continuity during disruptions (McDermid et al., 2022). Nevertheless, disparities in infrastructure capacity across missions are common, reflecting broader inequalities in resource allocation and institutional prioritization. Overall, the literature portrays resource and infrastructure capacity as uneven and closely intertwined with organizational and human resource constraints, shaping the practical limits of consular service delivery for migrant workers.

Public Service Theory: Citizen-Oriented Principles in Consular Services

The literature reviewed through the lens of public service theory consistently frames consular services as an extension of the state's obligation to serve and protect its citizens beyond national borders. Across international studies, core public service principles—such as citizen orientation, accessibility, equity, and accountability—are frequently invoked to describe expectations placed on consular institutions. Research on migrant worker protection highlights that consular services are increasingly evaluated not only on procedural compliance but also on their responsiveness to the needs and vulnerabilities of migrant populations (McDermid et al., 2022). Several studies emphasize that accessibility emerges as a central concern, particularly for migrant workers facing legal, linguistic, or socio-economic barriers in host countries.

The literature also reveals variation in how public service values are operationalized in consular contexts. Some studies emphasize formal service standards and legal mandates as primary mechanisms for ensuring accountability, while others focus on service outcomes and user experiences as indicators of public value. Equity is frequently discussed in relation to differential access to services among migrant workers, especially those in irregular or precarious employment situations. Overall, the literature portrays public service principles as a normative backdrop that shapes expectations of consular performance, while empirical analyses document uneven realization of these principles across institutional contexts and national systems. Studies on consular engagement further indicate that the capacity of overseas missions to protect migrant workers reflects broader state commitments to citizen-oriented public service delivery beyond national borders (Rosenblum & Meissner, 2021).

Policy Implementation Theory: Top-down and Bottom-up Dynamics

Findings from the literature analyzed through policy implementation theory consistently point to a gap between formal policy frameworks for migrant worker protection and their practical implementation in consular services. Many studies document the predominance of top-down implementation structures, where policies are centrally designed and disseminated through hierarchical administrative systems to overseas missions (Haque et al., 2021). In such arrangements, consular offices are positioned primarily as implementing units tasked with applying standardized rules and procedures.

However, empirical studies also highlight the limits of purely top-down approaches in complex cross-border environments. Variations in host-country regulations, institutional capacity, and case-specific circumstances often require

adaptation at the implementation level. The literature reports that implementors at consular offices frequently encounter ambiguity in policy directives, leading to discretionary interpretation during service delivery. Several studies identify structural barriers—such as fragmented mandates across agencies and limited feedback mechanisms—that constrain bottom-up learning and adaptation. Overall, the literature depicts policy implementation in consular services as characterized by formal hierarchical control combined with significant on-the-ground adjustment, reflecting persistent implementation gaps rather than fully aligned policy execution.

Street-Level Bureaucracy in Consular Service Delivery

Research drawing on street-level bureaucracy highlights the central role of frontline consular officials in shaping service outcomes for migrant workers. The literature consistently reports that consular officers operate under conditions of high workload, time pressure, and resource constraints, which necessitate the exercise of discretion in daily decision-making. Empirical studies document how frontline officials develop coping strategies to manage competing demands, such as prioritizing certain cases, simplifying procedures, or relying on informal practices to expedite service delivery (Glyniadaki, 2024).

The literature further shows that discretion is not uniformly applied but varies across institutional settings and individual officers. Some studies report that discretionary practices enhance service responsiveness in urgent or humanitarian cases, while others note that discretion can lead to inconsistencies in service provision. Importantly, the literature emphasizes that such discretionary behavior is structurally conditioned by organizational rules, performance expectations, and workload pressures rather than solely by individual preferences. Overall, findings from street-level bureaucracy research underscore that frontline practices constitute a significant component of administrative capacity in consular services, shaping how formal rules are enacted in practice. Implementation studies increasingly highlight that frontline practices and discretionary judgments are integral to understanding policy outcomes, particularly in complex service environments such as migration governance (Van der Heijden & Kuhlmann, 2022).

Institutional Theory: Formal Rules, Norms, and Organizational Structures

From an institutional theory perspective, the literature highlights the influence of formal rules, organizational structures, and institutional norms on the capacity and readiness of consular services. Studies consistently report that consular institutions operate within dense regulatory environments shaped by domestic laws, international agreements, and diplomatic conventions. These formal frameworks structure service mandates and constrain organizational flexibility (Csatlós, 2022). At the same time, institutional norms and organizational cultures are shown to shape how rules are interpreted and enacted within consular offices.

Comparative analyses reveal variation in institutional arrangements across countries, reflecting differences in administrative traditions and governance models. Some studies emphasize hierarchical and rule-bound institutional designs, while others document more flexible and network-oriented arrangements. Organizational culture is frequently identified as a mediating factor that influences how formal rules translate into practice, particularly in managing complex migrant cases. Overall, the literature suggests that institutional readiness in consular services is embedded in broader institutional configurations, where formal structures, informal norms, and organizational routines interact to shape administrative capacity.

Discussion

Theoretical Interpretation

The findings of this literature review reaffirm the central premise of Administrative Capacity Theory that institutional performance in public service delivery is contingent upon a multidimensional configuration of capacities rather than on formal mandates alone. Interpreted through the lens of Merilee S. Grindle, the persistent constraints identified in human resources, organizational processes, coordination mechanisms, and infrastructure suggest that consular services for migrant workers operate within structurally bounded institutional environments. Grindle's emphasis on institutional capacity as context-sensitive and politically embedded is particularly salient in cross-border service delivery, where consular institutions face layered constraints arising from host-country regulations, diplomatic protocols, and resource asymmetries. The literature synthesized in this review extends Grindle's framework by demonstrating that institutional readiness in consular services is not merely a function of internal administrative arrangements, but also of transnational governance contexts that amplify capacity vulnerabilities.

When interpreted through the policy capacity framework advanced by Michael Howlett and Xun Wu, the results indicate a systematic imbalance across analytical, operational, and political dimensions of capacity. While formal policy frameworks and regulatory guidance provide a degree of analytical capacity, the reviewed studies reveal persistent weaknesses in operational capacity, particularly at the level of overseas missions tasked with service delivery. Moreover, political capacity—understood as the ability to coordinate actors, manage stakeholder expectations, and maintain legitimacy—emerges as uneven and often under-institutionalized in consular contexts. These findings suggest that policy capacity frameworks require further contextualization when applied to institutions operating beyond territorial boundaries, where coordination and legitimacy are negotiated across multiple governance arenas rather than within a single national system.

The interpretation of human resource capacity findings further nuances administrative capacity theory by highlighting the limits of capacity conceptualized solely as skills or staffing levels. The literature demonstrates that consular officials frequently engage in discretionary and adaptive practices under conditions of workload pressure and resource scarcity. This observation aligns with, yet also extends, administrative capacity frameworks by underscoring the relational and behavioral dimensions of capacity. Rather than functioning as neutral implementers, frontline consular officers actively mediate institutional capacity through daily practices, suggesting that capacity is enacted rather than merely possessed. This insight challenges more static interpretations of capacity and supports calls within the literature to conceptualize administrative capacity as a dynamic and practice-based phenomenon.

The integration of policy implementation theory and street-level bureaucracy provides further explanatory depth to these findings. The dominance of top-down implementation structures identified in the Results underscores the persistence of hierarchical control in consular administration. However, the frequent reliance on discretionary practices at the frontline level reveals the practical limits of top-down governance in complex service environments. Drawing on street-level bureaucracy, these findings indicate that discretion functions as an informal capacity mechanism, compensating for procedural rigidity and coordination gaps. This interpretation strengthens the theoretical linkage between administrative capacity and implementation dynamics, suggesting that institutional readiness cannot be fully understood without accounting for how frontline actors interpret and operationalize policy under constraint (Glyniadaki, 2024; Walsh & Ferazzoli, 2025).

From an institutional theory perspective, the findings illuminate how formal rules, organizational structures, and institutional norms jointly shape consular

capacity. The literature shows that institutional readiness is embedded in historically grounded administrative traditions and organizational cultures that influence how capacity is mobilized. Differences in coordination practices, procedural flexibility, and organizational responses across consular systems reflect deeper institutional logics rather than isolated managerial choices. This interpretation reinforces the argument that administrative capacity is inseparable from institutional environments and that readiness emerges from the interaction between formal structures and informal norms (Csatlós, 2022).

Taken together, the theoretical interpretation of these findings yields several theoretical contributions. First, this review advances administrative capacity theory by extending it into the relatively underexplored domain of consular services and cross-border public administration. Second, it demonstrates the value of integrating policy capacity, implementation theory, street-level bureaucracy, and institutional theory to capture the multi-layered nature of institutional readiness. By synthesizing previously fragmented literatures, this article reframes consular services not merely as diplomatic functions but as complex public service systems whose performance is shaped by dynamic configurations of administrative capacity. This integrative interpretation provides a stronger conceptual foundation for subsequent analyses of institutional and policy implications, which are addressed in the following sections.

Institutional and Policy Implications

The synthesized findings of this literature review indicate that institutional readiness in consular services is fundamentally shaped by the configuration and interaction of multiple dimensions of administrative capacity. Variations and constraints in human resource capacity, organizational and procedural arrangements, institutional coordination, and resource availability collectively influence how consular institutions respond to the needs of migrant workers. From an institutional perspective, these findings imply that readiness is not a static organizational attribute but a relational and context-dependent condition. Consular institutions operate at the intersection of domestic public administration systems and transnational governance environments, where policy objectives, legal frameworks, and service demands often evolve asynchronously. As a result, institutional readiness emerges as a function of how administrative capacity is mobilized and recalibrated across levels of governance rather than as a direct outcome of policy design alone (Haque et al., 2021).

The implications for migrant worker protection policy are particularly salient when human resource capacity is considered. The literature shows that staffing levels, skill composition, and professional support mechanisms directly shape service responsiveness and consistency. In policy terms, this suggests that formal protection frameworks may overestimate institutional readiness if they assume uniform administrative capacity across consular missions. The findings further indicate that frontline consular officials often act as de facto policy translators, mediating between centrally defined mandates and the situational realities of migrant workers abroad. This reinforces the relevance of policy implementation theory in explaining why policy outcomes diverge from formal intentions, especially in contexts where policy instruments are designed centrally but implemented in heterogeneous institutional environments.

Organizational and procedural capacity also carries important implications for institutional governance. The literature demonstrates that standardized procedures contribute to predictability and accountability but may simultaneously constrain adaptability under conditions of crisis or fluctuating service demand. This tension has implications for policy design, particularly in the balance between procedural uniformity and discretionary flexibility. Rather than viewing procedural deviation as institutional failure, the literature suggests that such practices often function as adaptive responses to capacity constraints. Consequently, institutional readiness should be understood as the ability of organizations to manage this balance

coherently, aligning procedural frameworks with the realities of service delivery without undermining accountability (McDermid et al., 2022).

The findings on institutional and coordination capacity underscore the governance challenges inherent in consular services for migrant workers. Weak coordination among ministries, overseas missions, and host-country institutions frequently undermines service continuity and policy coherence. From a policy perspective, this highlights the limits of sectorally fragmented governance models in addressing cross-border service delivery. Institutional readiness, as reflected in the literature, depends on the extent to which coordination mechanisms—formal and informal—enable information sharing, joint problem-solving, and aligned decision-making across organizational boundaries. These implications resonate with broader debates in public administration on whole-of-government and network governance, suggesting that consular services represent a critical yet underexamined arena where such governance challenges are acutely visible (Csatlós, 2022).

Resource and infrastructure capacity further shape the scope and limits of institutional readiness. The literature indicates that budgetary constraints and uneven infrastructure provision restrict the operationalization of migrant protection policies, regardless of their normative ambition. Importantly, these constraints are not merely technical but institutional, reflecting broader patterns of prioritization and allocation within state systems. From a policy standpoint, this suggests that institutional readiness cannot be inferred solely from policy commitments or regulatory frameworks; it must be assessed in relation to the material and organizational conditions under which consular services operate. The uneven distribution of resources across missions also raises questions about equity in service provision, a concern closely linked to public service theory and the state's obligation to serve citizens abroad.

Taken together, these implications point to a conceptual reframing of consular services as institutionally embedded public service systems rather than as isolated administrative units. The literature reviewed in this article implies that policy effectiveness in migrant worker protection is contingent upon the alignment between policy design, administrative capacity, and institutional governance arrangements. However, the scope of these implications remains bounded by the nature of the reviewed studies, which are predominantly descriptive and context-specific. As such, the implications articulated here should be understood as analytically grounded reflections rather than generalized prescriptions. Future empirical research is needed to examine how variations in administrative capacity and institutional readiness manifest in specific national contexts, including Indonesia, and how policy reforms interact with organizational practices at the consular level. These considerations provide a logical transition to the next section, which situates the findings of this review in relation to the broader state-of-the-art literature on administrative capacity and cross-border public service delivery.

5. Comparison with State-of-the-Art

State-of-the-art research on administrative capacity and policy capacity has substantially advanced understanding of how governments translate policy intent into performance, particularly within domestic policy sectors such as health, education, and social protection. Influential contributions rooted in state capacity and policy capacity traditions—most notably those associated with Merilee S. Grindle, Michael Howlett, and Xun Wu—have conceptualized capacity as a multidimensional construct spanning analytical, operational, and political domains. However, much of this literature has examined capacity sectorally and within national boundaries, often treating administrative capacity as a property of centralized ministries or domestic service agencies. As a result, the applicability of these frameworks to cross-border public services, including consular administration, has remained underexplored and theoretically under-specified (Brenton, 2023; Saddi et al., 2023).

In parallel, a growing body of research on consular services and migrant protection has focused on legal mandates, diplomatic practices, crisis response, and duty-of-care obligations, particularly during transnational emergencies. While these studies have generated valuable empirical insights into service provision for citizens abroad, they typically approach consular services through normative or descriptive lenses, emphasizing rights, obligations, and emergency measures rather than institutional capacity configurations (Birka et al., 2022; Csatlós, 2022). Where administrative issues are addressed, they are often discussed in isolation—such as staffing shortages or procedural rigidity—without being situated within a comprehensive capacity framework. This fragmentation limits the ability of existing studies to explain how different capacity dimensions interact to shape institutional readiness in consular contexts.

Furthermore, research employing policy implementation theory and street-level bureaucracy has shed light on discretion, coping strategies, and implementation gaps in migration-related services. These studies have convincingly demonstrated that frontline actors mediate policy outcomes under conditions of uncertainty and resource constraint. Nonetheless, such analyses frequently remain micro-level and actor-centric, with limited integration into broader institutional and capacity-oriented explanations. Similarly, institutional theory has been applied to analyze organizational norms and structures, but often without explicit linkage to administrative capacity as a systemic construct. Consequently, the existing literature remains theoretically segmented, with insights dispersed across parallel streams rather than synthesized into an integrated explanatory model (Glyniadaki, 2024; Walsh & Ferazzoli, 2025).

Against this backdrop, the present article positions itself as a conceptual integrator that advances the state of the art in three key ways. First, it employs Administrative Capacity Theory as an explicitly integrative framework to synthesize findings across diverse literatures, thereby moving beyond partial or sector-specific analyses. By systematically organizing evidence around human resource, organizational–procedural, institutional–coordination, and resource–infrastructure capacities, the article provides a holistic account of how capacity configurations shape institutional readiness in consular services.

Second, this article advances the literature by bridging core capacity frameworks with supporting theoretical lenses—Public Service Theory, Policy Implementation Theory, Street-Level Bureaucracy, and Institutional Theory—within a single, coherent synthesis. Rather than treating these theories as competing explanations, the article demonstrates their theoretical complementarity, showing how each lens illuminates distinct but interconnected mechanisms underlying consular service performance. This integrative approach contrasts with much of the existing literature, where theories are applied in isolation and empirical findings remain weakly connected across analytical levels.

Third, the article contributes to the state of the art through its focused attention on institutional readiness in consular services for Indonesian migrant workers, a context that has received limited systematic treatment in international public administration scholarship. While Indonesia is frequently cited as a major migrant-sending country, prior research has rarely examined its consular institutions through a comprehensive administrative capacity lens. By foregrounding institutional readiness in a cross-border service environment, this review extends capacity theory into a transnational governance setting, thereby enriching the conceptual reach of administrative capacity scholarship.

In sum, compared with the state-of-the-art literature, this article offers a distinctive contribution by synthesizing fragmented theoretical and empirical strands into a unified conceptual narrative. It clarifies what is already known about administrative capacity and consular services, identifies the limits of existing approaches, and articulates a novel integrative perspective centered on institutional readiness. This comparative positioning not only underscores the article's novelty but

also provides a clear analytical bridge to the concluding section, which consolidates the study's contributions and outlines directions for future research.

6. Conclusion

This literature review has synthesized international scholarship on administrative capacity in consular services to articulate a comprehensive understanding of institutional readiness in serving Indonesian migrant workers. The review demonstrates that readiness is not reducible to any single capacity dimension; rather, it emerges from the interaction of human resource capacity, organizational and procedural capacity, institutional and coordination capacity, and resource and infrastructure capacity. Across the reviewed studies, these dimensions jointly shape how consular institutions translate formal mandates into service outcomes under conditions of cross-border governance, legal pluralism, and fluctuating demand. Human resources condition frontline responsiveness and discretion; organizational procedures structure consistency and adaptability; coordination mechanisms mediate inter-agency coherence; and resources and infrastructure define the operational limits of service provision. Taken together, the literature indicates that institutional readiness is a dynamic, context-dependent condition enacted through everyday administrative practices rather than a static organizational attribute.

Beyond synthesizing findings, this article makes a theoretical contribution to the study of administrative capacity and public administration. By positioning Administrative Capacity Theory as an integrative framework and systematically linking it with Public Service Theory, Policy Implementation Theory, Street-Level Bureaucracy, and Institutional Theory, the review advances a multi-level, practice-sensitive understanding of capacity in cross-border public services. This integration helps bridge previously fragmented strands of research that have tended to examine capacity dimensions, implementation dynamics, or frontline discretion in isolation. Conceptually, the article reframes consular services from being treated primarily as diplomatic functions to being understood as institutionally embedded public service systems, thereby extending capacity theory into transnational settings that have been comparatively underexamined in the literature.

Several limitations of this review should be acknowledged. First, the analysis is constrained by the scope of the selected corpus, which prioritizes peer-reviewed international literature published within a defined time frame; relevant insights from gray literature or country-specific policy reports were not systematically included. Second, as a narrative–integrative review, the study emphasizes conceptual synthesis rather than causal inference, and thus does not test hypotheses empirically. Third, while the review foregrounds Indonesian migrant workers as the focal context, many of the included studies are comparative or drawn from other national settings, which may limit the direct transferability of specific institutional configurations. These limitations, however, do not diminish the value of the review's integrative perspective; rather, they clarify the analytical boundaries within which the conclusions should be interpreted.

Looking ahead, the findings of this review point to several future research directions. Empirical studies—both qualitative and quantitative—are needed to examine how the synthesized dimensions of institutional readiness manifest within specific consular missions and policy regimes. Comparative cross-national research could further test the applicability of the integrated framework across different administrative traditions and migration systems. Longitudinal studies would also be valuable to assess how institutional readiness evolves in response to crises, reforms, and shifts in migration patterns. By building on the conceptual synthesis offered in this article, future research can deepen understanding of administrative capacity in cross-border public services and contribute to more theoretically grounded and empirically informed analyses of consular governance and migrant worker protection.

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