

Rationalization and Bureaucratization in the Indonesian Education System: An Analysis of Teacher Administrative Burden and Digitalization Complaints on KOMPAS Online Media

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study examines the phenomena of rationalization and bureaucratization in the Indonesian education system, focusing on teachers' administrative burdens and complaints related to educational digitalization. The study is grounded in the growing implementation of efficiency-oriented, technology-driven education policies that aim to simplify bureaucracy but are often perceived by teachers as increasing administrative burdens.

Methodology – A qualitative research design with a document analysis approach was employed. Data were collected from online media reports published by *KOMPAS* and *Kompas.id* using purposive sampling to select articles addressing teachers' administrative workloads, bureaucratic simplification, digital education applications, and policy responses. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, including data reduction, categorization, and thematic interpretation, guided by Max Weber's concept of the iron cage of bureaucracy.

Findings – Policies emphasizing efficiency, accountability, and administrative modernization paradoxically expanded teachers' administrative workloads. Digitalization has generated new forms of bureaucracy that demand continuous adaptation, increase work pressure, and shift teachers' focus from pedagogical practices to documentation and reporting tasks. Consequently, teachers' professional autonomy is diminished, revealing a misalignment between policy objectives and teachers' lived experiences.

Novelty – This study contributes original insights by combining media discourse analysis with Weberian bureaucratic theory to reveal the unintended consequences of digitalization on teacher professionalism and identity.

Significance – The study has significant implications for policymakers, school administrators, and education researchers by highlighting the need to reorient policy to prioritize pedagogical quality and teacher autonomy.

Keywords: Bureaucratization; Digitization of education; Rationalization; Teacher Administration Burden.

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1. Introduction

Education is a fundamental element in human development and in the development of the nation as a whole, both at the global and national levels. In Indonesia, education is positioned as a strategic instrument to achieve sustainable national development goals, namely by improving the quality of human resources who are competent, productive, and adaptable to changing times. In practice, education policies are designed to improve the effectiveness of learning and school governance through systematic administrative and supervision mechanisms. However, field dynamics show that the education modernization agenda often intersects with structural dilemmas, especially regarding the increasingly complex role of teachers as administrative demands continue to grow.

Changes in contemporary education cannot be separated from the influence of rationalization and bureaucratization processes, which, according to a number of researchers, are a consequence of the strengthening of standards, accountability, and efficiency in the modern education system. According to *classical sociological literature on bureaucracy, especially the work of Max Weber, bureaucracy is built on formal rationality, emphasizing strict administrative rules, procedures, and controls*. In the iron cage concept of bureaucracy, Weber points out that the modern bureaucratic system, although designed to deliver efficiency, actually traps individuals in a web of rules that limit professional autonomy and creativity. This framework is widely used in educational studies to understand how bureaucratic structures can affect teachers' work relations and autonomy in pedagogical practice (Weber, 1978).

In the context of Indonesian education, the rationalization of the education bureaucracy is achieved through a series of policies and oversight mechanisms that position teachers not only as educators but also as implementers of administrative procedures that often consume their time and attention. This reflects the reality in which the logic of efficiency, accountability, and the modernization of the educational administration apparatus underpins public education policy. Research studies show that the phenomenon of teachers' administrative burden in the Merdeka curriculum, for example, has had an impact on learning effectiveness and increased teachers' work stress, because administrative tasks related to learning planning, achievement reporting, and evaluation of learning outcomes have become increasingly intensive (Rosyada, Syahada, & Chanifudin, 2025).

In addition, the transformation of education towards the digital era presents a new variable in the study of education bureaucratization. Digitization of education administration is projected to improve administrative efficiency, accelerate

reporting, and reduce data errors, thereby facilitating school management (e-administration) and access to information (Sugandi & Rodhiyah, 2024). However, amid this potential efficiency, a number of empirical studies show that digitalization also brings new challenges, including high digital literacy requirements, diverse platform governance, and uneven infrastructure gaps across regions. In the Indonesian context, administrative digitalization is often a field of dilemma, because not all schools have adequate infrastructure, human resources, and internet access to make optimal use of technology (Santoso, 2025).

The above facts show that the administrative burden on teachers cannot be understood simply as a function of a neutral, bureaucratic rationalization policy, but rather as a structural phenomenon full of contradictions. On the one hand, policies oriented towards efficiency and modernization are expected to optimize the implementation of education. On the other hand, the resulting administrative pressure often marginalizes essential pedagogical activities—such as teacher-student interaction, learning creativity, and professional reflection. This aligns with Forsyth et al.'s (2018) view that the bureaucratization of education can encourage teachers to be more oriented towards fulfilling administrative procedures rather than a reflective, transformative learning process. The study shows that high administrative pressure not only reduces the quality of teaching but also creates significant work stress for teachers, especially when the demands of administrative digitalization are increasingly intensive and procedural.

However, most of the research literature in Indonesia tends to be administrative and descriptive, or to assess digitalization as a mere technical solution, without comprehensively linking it to the dynamics of teacher professionalism in daily educational practices. This gap is important, as policy implementation is often presented as an idealized goal that fails to account for teachers' subjective experiences, institutional readiness, and the social-bureaucratic realities of the field. For example, a study on the impact of administrative digitalization in elementary schools shows an increase in administrative efficiency, but also notes the importance of continuous policy support to ensure digitalization functions optimally, even contributing to the professionalism of education administration (Sugandi & Rodhiyah, 2024). This fact shows that digitalization is not just an efficiency tool, but part of a bureaucratic transformation that requires a contextual reading of teacher capacity, infrastructure readiness, and responsive policy implementation strategies.

In addition, Indonesian education journals have noted that the education bureaucracy is often seen as a determining factor in national professional education governance, yet also a source of inequality and challenges that affect the quality of education as a whole. Research on the educational bureaucratic gap shows that the administrative system's work practices often raise public questions about professionalism and the alignment of policy with practical needs in schools. This phenomenon arises from an imbalance between the demands of formal bureaucratic

policies and the capacity of educational institutions to implement them across various regions of Indonesia (Maria, Silpiya, & Rijal, 2025).

Within this framework, the mass media is an important space to see how educational discourse and bureaucratization are produced, disseminated, and criticized by the public. National news portals such as KOMPAS and Kompas.id consistently document the dynamics of contemporary education discourse, including the administrative burden on teachers, the challenges of digitalization, and education policy responses at various levels. The media is a rich resource for understanding how the tension between policy promises and the realities of implementation on the ground is publicly represented, and how these narratives shape social perceptions of the teaching profession and educational reform.

In response to this complex structural reality, this study focuses on the phenomenon of rationalization and bureaucratization in Indonesian education, with particular attention to the administrative burden on teachers and digitalization-related complaints, as reported by KOMPAS and Kompas.id. This study aims to empirically uncover how policies framed in the logic of efficiency, accountability, and modernization have implications for teachers' daily work, beyond simple quantitative data, by including teachers' experiences as active social subjects within an ever-changing educational bureaucracy.

Therefore, this study offers an important contribution to the Indonesian educational literature by presenting a more holistic perspective on the administrative burden of teachers and digital bureaucratization; not only as a technical phenomenon, but as a result of shifts in social, political, and technological structures that affect the professionalism and pedagogical practices of teachers in the contemporary era.

2. Methods

This research uses a qualitative approach to examine teachers' experiences and discourses regarding the rationalization and bureaucratization of education administration, as reflected in media reports from KOMPAS and Kompas.id. This approach was chosen because it can capture the social meaning, subjective experience, and work dynamics of teachers that cannot be represented by numerical data, but rather through the interpretation of narratives and media texts (Moleong, 2019; Sugiyono, 2021). Data were collected through a study of online media documents, including articles on administrative burden, bureaucratic simplification, the digitization of educational applications, and policy responses. Articles were selected using purposive sampling based on the relevance of the theme and the publication period. The analysis is carried out using thematic content analysis, through the stages of data reduction, category grouping, and thematic interpretation of the social meaning that emerges from the text. Max Weber's iron cage framework of bureaucracy is used to interpret the impact of rationalization and bureaucratization on work relations, professionalism, and teacher identity. This

method highlights the structure of meaning and the socio-bureaucratic implications that shape the teacher's experience in modern educational practice.

3. Results and Discussion

There is a dominant narrative in photographing the dynamics of contemporary Indonesian education: the strengthening of the rationalization and bureaucratization processes, which paradoxically increases teachers' administrative workload. Under the logic of efficiency, accountability, and modernization of the education system, teachers are increasingly placed in a network of formal procedures and digital mechanisms that demand layered administrative compliance. Digitalization, which was originally projected as an instrument to facilitate pedagogical work, often, in practice, becomes a new form of bureaucratic domination that consumes teachers' time, energy, and attention at the core of their profession as educators. Online media, in this case KOMPAS and Kompas.id, have become a space for public articulation that records the tension between the promise of policy rationalization and the reality of teachers' work in the field. Therefore, the following table presents empirical findings regarding the administrative burden and complaints of teacher digitalization as a concrete manifestation of what Max Weber calls the iron cage of bureaucracy in Indonesia's modern education system

Table 1 - Teacher Administration Burden and Digitalization Complaints in the Indonesian Education System

Analysis Aspect	Key Findings	Forms of Rationalization and Bureaucratization	Impact on Teachers	Data Source (KOMPAS Online Media)
Policy commitment and education oversight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers are burdened with increasingly administrative tasks Complex and time-consuming teaching, so it becomes a source of stress and interferes with focused pedagogy. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Formal rationalization through administrative standardization, expansion Reporting instruments and strengthening bureaucratic control. 	Reduced teaching time, increased psychological stress, and a potential decrease in learning quality.	https://www.kompas.com/edu/read/2024/12/02/142859171/Unravel-teacher-administration-load
Changes in the teacher performance management system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The government simplifies the teacher performance assessment system with reporting once a year and data integration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instrumental rationalization through simplification of bureaucratic procedures, reduction of reporting frequency, and centralization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The administrative burden is relatively reduced, but teachers are still facing the process of adapting to the new mechanism. 	https://www.kompas.id/artikel/performance-management-changed-by-reducing-teacher-administration-burden

Analysis Aspect	Key Findings	Forms of Rationalization and Bureaucratization	Impact on Teachers	Data Source (KOMPAS Online Media)
The dilemma of teachers in the siege of digital applications	<p>through the head school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts to simplify administration have not completely eliminated the burden due to the demands of technological adaptation and changes in the digital work system. 	<p>of uploaders' data.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital bureaucratization through integrated platforms that require technology-based procedural compliance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers experience ambiguity between administrative efficiency and the technical pressures of using applications. 	<p>https://www.kompas.id/artikel/guru-dilemma-in-encircle-application</p>
Digitization of educational applications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers are required to use a variety of educational applications that • Aiming to increase efficiency, but is constrained by infrastructure and digital literacy that has not yet been evenly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Technological rationalization through the fragmentation of digital platforms for assessment and • Education Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some teachers feel helped, but many are burdened by connectivity-limited and complex systems. 	<p>https://www.kompas.id/artikel/guru-tracked-miscellaneous-application</p>
Political commitment to reducing administrative burden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The government, through the Deputy Minister of Education, promises to reduce the administrative burden so that teachers can focus more on teaching and not experience fatigue. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Normative rationalization through policy commitments, bureaucratic reform discourse, and teacher competency improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is hope for an improvement in teachers' working conditions, although the implementation of the policy is still waiting for concrete realization. 	<p>https://regional.kompas.com/read/2024/11/15/215705378/wamen-education-promise-reduce-administrative-burden-teacher-what-reason</p>

The process of bureaucratic rationalization in the education system has been shown to have significant implications, including increased administrative workload and weakened teachers' professional autonomy. Rationalization, which is normatively directed to create efficiency, accountability, and order, often leads to

bureaucratic expansion that increases administrative obligations without adequate resource support. Fitzgerald (2009) points out that systemic changes in educational governance tend to tighten work procedures and increase accountability demands, resulting in teachers being trapped in rigid, layered administrative mechanisms. This condition shifts teachers' focus from substantive pedagogical activities to fulfilling administrative obligations, ultimately reducing the time, energy, and reflective space needed to build meaningful pedagogical relationships with students. Similar findings are put forward by Mäkelä and Whipp (2015), who argue that the rationalization of educational organizations often creates a paradox: efforts to improve efficiency actually expand the administrative workload and narrow teachers' professional capacity to carry out their primary role as educators.

In the contemporary context, the rationalization of the educational bureaucracy is further strengthened by the digitalization of administration, promoted as a solution to the inefficiencies of the manual system. However, studies have shown that digitalization does not necessarily reduce teachers' workloads; rather, it creates a new form of technology-based bureaucratization. Sager and Rosser (2021) emphasized that digital platforms in educational administration often reinforce existing control and supervision structures, thereby binding teachers to systemically programmed standard procedures. Instead of liberating, digitalization traps teachers in a new version of the iron cage of Weberian bureaucracy, where technological rationality replaces professional rationality. Oliveira and Peixoto (2021) added that the demands of mastering administrative technology erode teachers' autonomy in managing learning, as pedagogical decisions are increasingly determined by the logic of digital systems rather than by classroom context.

The increase in digital-based administrative demands also directly affects the quality of pedagogical practices and teacher-student relations. Teachers not only face increasing pressure for accountability but also have to adapt to a variety of complex, often fragmented digital platforms. Forsyth et al. (2018) show that excessive bureaucratization of education encourages teachers to focus more on meeting administrative indicators than on fostering reflective, transformative pedagogical interactions. As a result, the learning process tends to be reduced to technical-evaluative activities that emphasize documentation and reporting, as Klassen and Chiu (2010) also affirm that high administrative pressure contributes to a decrease in the quality of teaching and increased teacher work stress.

In the sociology of education, Max Weber's concept of the iron cage of bureaucracy has become an important analytical framework for understanding how modern bureaucratic structures limit teachers' autonomy and professionalism. Under a strict supervision regime and rigid standards of accountability, teachers lose of flexibility in making contextual and creative pedagogical decisions. Li (2021) asserts that intensive bureaucratic control not only erodes teachers' professional autonomy but also deepens a sense of alienation in their work. A follow-up impact of this condition is increased job dissatisfaction and desire to leave the profession,

as shown by You and Conley (2014), who found a strong link between bureaucratic pressure, low professional autonomy, and intention to leave the teaching profession.

Furthermore, government-brokered bureaucratic reforms and policies to simplify education administration often fail to fully reduce teachers' workloads at the implementation level. The gap between policy design and the reality of the field is a recurring structural problem. Nyakeko et al. (2023) show that many administrative reforms fail to achieve their initial goals due to weak implementation support, including insufficient training, limited infrastructure, and policy inconsistencies. As a result, teachers remain stuck in an intense, ongoing administrative routine. This condition is exacerbated by the findings of Sertel et al. (2021), who reveal that teachers' professional dissatisfaction often stems from bureaucracy that is not substantively simplified, but is simply diverted to new forms and media, including digital systems.

Therefore, rationalization and digitalization in the education system cannot be understood solely as a neutral technical process. Both are part of a structural transformation that reshapes work relationships, the meaning of professionalism, and teachers' identities in the modern education system. In line with Weber's (1978) critique, rationality designed to create efficiency and order can give rise to a new structural dominance that curbs individual autonomy. In the context of education, this paradox is evident when bureaucratic efficiency and procedural compliance take precedence over pedagogical quality and teachers' professional freedom, so that the substantive goals of education are at risk of being reduced by an increasingly reinforcing administrative logic.

4. Conclusions

Based on an analysis of KOMPAS and Kompas.id news reports, this study concludes that rationalization and bureaucratization in Indonesian education have increased teachers' administrative burden, both through formal procedures and digital mechanisms. Policies that emphasize efficiency, accountability, and modernization actually encourage a shift in teachers' focus from substantive pedagogical practices to fulfilling documentary obligations. Administrative digitalization, originally projected as a solution, often gives rise to new forms of bureaucratization that demand constant adaptation, increase work pressure, and reduce teachers' professional autonomy. These findings reinforce the relevance of Max Weber's concept of the iron cage of bureaucracy, in which bureaucratic rationality and technology serve as control mechanisms that limit teachers' creativity, reflection, and professional freedom. Therefore, education reform is not enough to simply simplify procedures or digitize the system; a policy reorientation is needed that places teacher autonomy and pedagogical quality at the center of educational rationalization.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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