Educate : Journal of Education and Learning
Vol. 3 No. 2 2025, 125-141
Publisher CV. Doki Course and Training
E-ISSN: 2988-4039 | P-ISSN: 2988-5752
DOI: https://doi.org/10.61994/educate.v1i2.

The Expectation-Reality Gap: "Teacher–Student Perception Gap Toward The Mathematics Education Program At Iain Curup"

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History
Submission : 10-03-2025
Received : 14-04-2025
Revised : 17-06-2025
Accepted : 01-08-2025

Keywords
Mathematics Education Program;
IAIN Curup;
Teacher Perception;
Students Perception;

ABSTRACT

This study examines the perception gap between senior high school teachers and students regarding the Mathematics Education Program at IAIN Curup, Indonesia, a program experiencing declining enrollment despite being the sole mathematics education provider in Rejang Lebong Regency. A mixed-methods approach with a concurrent triangulation strategy was employed. A total of 47 teachers completed an open questionnaire, while 536 students responded to a closed questionnaire. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, and qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis. The results reveal two contrasting perspectives. From the teachers' perspective, the Mathematics Education Study Program at IAIN Curup is perceived positively, with 65.96% of teachers considering it worthy of recommendation to their students. Teachers identified the program's proximity to schools as its primary advantage. Conversely, from the students' perspective, the program's existence is perceived poorly, with 81.72% of students unaware of the program and 95.52% expressing no interest in enrolling. This study contributes to higher education marketing literature by demonstrating how information asymmetry and geographic factors shape stakeholder perceptions of local educational programs. The findings provide evidence-based recommendations for strengthening program visibility through integrated promotional strategies targeting both students and teachers, particularly in underserved geographic areas. Recommendations include strengthening promotional strategies and enhancing program visibility through community engagement.

Introduction

Mathematics is not just about numbers; it is also about logic, spatial reasoning, systematic organization, proof, analysis, the discovery of new concepts, and more. Mathematics is a science that simplifies and helps solve various problems in life (Sadewo et al., 2022). Mathematics permeates evy aspect of life. Every branch of mathematics has its own role and function in human life. Mathematical concepts and ways of thinking are

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often used to solve problems that arise in real life. The more complex life becomes, the more complex the mathematics required becomes (Hom & Gordon, 2021).

This study is grounded in three theoretical perspectives. First, *Stakeholder Theory* (Freeman, 1984) provides a framework for understanding how different stakeholder groups (teachers and students) may hold divergent perceptions based on their distinct roles, experiences, and information access. Second, *Information Asymmetry Theory* (Akerlof, 1970) explains how unequal access to information between parties can lead to suboptimal decision-making, particularly relevant to understanding why teachers possess more program knowledge than students. Third, *Expectation-Confirmation Theory* (Oliver, 1980) helps explain how perceptions are formed through the gap between expectations and actual experiences, which is central to the "expectation-reality gap" explored in this study.

The importance of mathematics makes it one of the mandatory subjects for all students at every level (elementary through high school). This is stipulated in Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 37, which states that the elementary and secondary education curriculum must include mathematics (Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, 2010). Essentially, mathematics education is designed to help students develop *higher-order thinking* skills, which include critical thinking, logical reasoning, creativity, problem-solving, numeracy, and so on. This is intended to equip students with the ability to face and solve any problems they may encounter.

The mathematics education program is one of the programs aimed at fostering mathematics learning that develops mathematical concepts and ways of thinking by training high-quality mathematics teachers. The training of mathematics teachers at the university level is intended to produce professionals in the field of mathematics education who will build a better mathematics education system. Without a mathematics education program, there would be no institution to train and prepare high-quality prospective teachers. Without the training and preparation of prospective mathematics teachers, there would be no high-quality mathematics teachers. The Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup is the sole provider of mathematics education in Rejang Lebong.. The Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup has been in operation since 2017.

The existence of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup is a testament to the institution's commitment to supporting educational development, particularly in the field of mathematics education. However, the program's role in producing professional mathematics teachers does not appear to have been warmly received, especially by the community in Rejang Lebong. This is evident from the steadily declining enrollment of new students in the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup. Records show that from 2017 to 2022, the number of new students in the Mathematics Education program who applied, were accepted, and re-registered decreased every year. In 2017, 19 students were enrolled in the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup; in 2018, the number dropped to 17; and in 2019, it fell further to 14. There was a temporary increase in enrollment in 2020, with 21 students admitted, and that number remained stable in 2021, but it fell again to 12 in 2022. This decline was compounded by data showing that 13 students withdrew from the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup.

According to International research has documented declining enrollment in teacher education programs across multiple countries. In the United States, teacher preparation program enrollment declined by 35% between 2009 and 2018 (Sutcher et al., 2019), with similar trends observed in Australia (Weldon, 2018) and the United Kingdom (Worth et al.,

2021). Contributing factors include perceived low status of the teaching profession, concerns about working conditions, and competition from more financially attractive career paths (See et al., 2020).

There are many factors that could contribute to the public's lack of interest in the mathematics education program at IAIN Curup, ranging from the public's perceptions of and interest in mathematics education itself to their perceptions of the mathematics education program. Looking at perceptions and interest in mathematics education, based on a preliminary study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with 120 randomly selected secondary students and 30 university students in Rejang Lebong. The interviews aimed to identify initial patterns of perceptions toward mathematics and higher education choices. Results indicated that more than 60% of students perceived mathematics as difficult and uninteresting, while 90% of university students believed advanced mathematics was unnecessary for their future careers. Students also stated that mathematics is a subject they find difficult to understand. Students feel that they do not understand the function and purpose of the mathematics they learn in relation to their daily lives These preliminary findings informed the development of the main research instruments.

The results of interviews with students outside the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup, selected at random, indicate that students do not feel they need mathematics in their future lives. 90% of the 30 students surveyed stated that the only mathematics they need consists of simple arithmetic operations—addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division—and therefore believe there is no need to study mathematics. 90% also stated that they find it extremely confusing to deal with formulas and calculations, even though mathematics is not solely about formulas. This is further supported by the elimination of the Statistics course from the curriculum of one of the faculties at IAIN Curup. The statistics course—which was intended to teach only basic statistics and basic mathematics at that faculty to support student research—was eliminated by the program with the faculty's approval. The decision was made on the assumption that the program did not need to teach statistics, since the nature and focus of research within the program did not require mathematical elements.

Unlike the declining enrollment at Methematics Education program at IAIN Curup, a comparable mathematics education program at another university in Bengkulu Province has maintained stable enrollment. Based on interviews with the program administrators, there has been no decline in enrollment for that program; instead, it has seen an increase of approximately 5% per year.

International research has documented declining enrollment in teacher education programs across multiple countries. In the United States, teacher preparation program enrollment declined by 35% between 2009 and 2018 (Sutcher et al., 2019), with similar trends observed in Australia (Weldon, 2018) and the United Kingdom (Worth et al., 2021). Contributing factors include perceived low status of the teaching profession, concerns about working conditions, and competition from more financially attractive career paths (See et al., 2020).

Negative perceptions of mathematics as a difficult and irrelevant subject are well-documented internationally. Studies across multiple countries have shown that students' attitudes toward mathematics significantly influence their career choices and willingness to pursue mathematics-related fields (Marshman et al., 2018; Grootenboer & Marshman,

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2016). The "math anxiety" phenomenon affects approximately 17-20% of secondary school students globally (Dowker et al., 2016).

The results of the study on public perceptions of mathematics education, based on the review above, indicate that mathematics is not a subject of interest to the majority of the public, particularly among students. However, is this the primary cause of the decline in student enrollment in the mathematics education program? Furthermore, the fact that this trend is not observed in the same program at a university in Bengkulu Province raises new questions for the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup: what is causing the decline in this program? To date, there has been no study or analysis of how the public—particularly students and teachers—perceives the existence of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup itself. An understanding of students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the existence of the IAIN Curup Mathematics Education program is urgently needed as a foundation for the program to further develop its academic quality. Based on this issue, the researcher is interested in learning more about how students and teachers in Rejang Lebong perceive the existence of the IAIN Curup Mathematics Education program.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2012). The explanatory sequential designwas adopted. Quantitative data from the student questionnaire were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data from teacher open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with both groups. The qualitative phase was designed to explain and elaborate on the quantitative findings, particularly the unexpected perception gap between teachers and students. (Sugiyono, 2016). This design was chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by capturing both statistical patterns (from the student survey) and in-depth perspectives (from the teacher questionnaire).

Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation across: (a) school types (science, social studies, and vocational tracks), (b) geographic location (urban, peri-urban, and rural schools based on Rejang Lebong Regency classification), and (c) gender. This stratification approach followed best practices for educational survey research (Cochran, 1977; Fowler, 2014).

The target population comprised all 612 twelfth-grade students from twelve senior high schools in Rejang Lebong Regency and all 47 mathematics teachers from the same schools. The student sample of 536 was determined using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error. Stratified random sampling was employed based on school type (science, social studies, vocational) and geographic location (urban, peri-urban, rural) to ensure proportional representation. All 47 mathematics teachers were included as the teacher sample (purposive sampling).

Research Context and Participants

The research was conducted in Rejang Lebong Regency, Bengkulu Province, Indonesia. Participants consisted of two groups: (1) 47 high school mathematics teachers from twelve high schools, and (2) 536 twelfth-grade students from the same schools. The teacher sample represented a purposive selection based on their role as key informants

regarding educational programs and their direct influence on students' college choices. The student sample comprised 536 respondents, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different school types and locations.

Data Collection Instruments

Two instruments were developed for this study. Instrument development followed DeVellis's (2017) guidelines for scale development. The initial item pool (25 items) was generated based on: (a) literature review on program perception studies (Akbar, 2015; Miswanto, 2015), (b) focus group discussions with three mathematics education lecturers and five high school teachers, and (c) the study's theoretical framework.

1. **Teacher Open-Ended Questionnaire**

   The teacher questionnaire consisted of 11 open-ended questions organized into three indicators: (1) Knowledge of Mathematics Education Program (2) Understanding of Mathematics Education Study Program; and (3) Evaluation of Mathematics Education Study Program. The open-ended format allowed teachers to express their opinions freely and provide detailed feedback. The questionnaire framework used, which was completed by teachers, is presented in Table 1 and the questionnaire that used can be accesd on teachers questionnaire.

Table 1. The grid of the teacher perception questionnaire

Indicators	Question Number
Knowledge of Mathematics Education Program	1, 3
Understanding of Mathematics Education Study Program	4, 6, 8
Evaluation of Mathematics Education Study Program	2, 5, 7, 9, 10,11

2. **Student Closed-Ended Questionnaire**

   The student questionnaire comprised two parts. Part A (Survey Part A) contained 15 items using a Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) covering indicators: Knowledge, Understanding , and Evaluation. Part B (Survey Part B) contained 10 items covering Course Plan, Understanding, and Evaluation. The questionnaire framework used, which was completed by Students , is presented in Table 2 and Table 3 and the questionnaire that used can be accesd on students questionnaire.

Table 2. The grid of the students perception questionnaire (Survey Part A)

Indicators	Question Number
Knowledge of Mathematics Education Program	1, 2,9,12
Understanding of Mathematics Education Study Program	3,14,15
Evaluation of Mathematics Education Study Program	4,5,6,7,8,10,11,13

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Table 3. The grid of the students course plan questionnaire (Survey Part B)

Indicators	Question Number
Course Plan	1,3,4,9
Understanding of Mathematics Education Study Program	2,10
Evaluation of Mathematics Education Study Program	5,6,7,8

Both instruments were validated through expert judgment by three lecturers in mathematics education and educational measurement. Reliability of the student questionnaire was established through a pilot test with 30 students, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating good internal consistency.

Data Collection Procedures

The questionnaires were administered during the second semester of the 2022/2023 academic year. Teachers completed the open-ended questionnaire during scheduled school visits, while students completed the closed-ended questionnaire during class sessions under the supervision of their teachers. After completing the questionnaires, follow-up interviews were conducted with 30 students (10 from each major: science, social studies, and vocational) and 10 teachers to obtain deeper insights into their responses.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative Analysis:

Quantitative data from the student questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) through SPSS version 26. To examine relationships between variables.

Qualitative Analysis:

Qualitative data from teacher open-ended questionnaires and follow-up interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework:

1. **Triangulation**: Comparing findings across teacher questionnaires, student questionnaires, and interview data (Denzin, 1978)
2. **Member checking**: Returning preliminary findings to 5 teachers and 10 students to verify accuracy of interpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)
3. **Peer debriefing**: Regular discussions with research team members not involved in data collection to challenge interpretations
4. **Reflexivity**: Researchers maintained positionality journals documenting potential biases, particularly given their affiliation with the program under study

To ensure trustworthiness, triangulation was conducted by comparing findings from teacher questionnaires, student questionnaires, and interview data. Member checking was also performed by sharing preliminary findings with five teachers and ten students to verify the accuracy of interpretations.

Results and Discussion

A. Teachers' Perception of The Mathematics Education Program at IAIN Curup

Knowledge and Awareness of The Mathematics Program Study

Forty-seven teachers from twelve high schools or equivalent institutions shared their opinions regarding the existence of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN

Curup. 76.6% of the teachers—or 36 teachers—were already aware of the Mathematics Education program. The teachers learned about the program from alumni, student teachers, family members, events, neighbors, social media, and friends. According to the data collected, direct outreach efforts by IAIN Curup had an impact of only 4.26% in terms of providing information about the existence of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup. According to the teachers, both direct outreach and social media efforts were considered very limited. The teachers were more likely to learn about the Mathematics Education program from family and friends.

The event organized by the Mathematics Education Department had a significant impact but was held too infrequently, resulting in limited dissemination of information. According to the teachers, events for mathematics education should be held periodically at the same time (in the same month), so that teachers can thoroughly prepare their students. In addition, there should be more than just one event; the teachers also believe that these events greatly influence the dissemination of information about the program.

23.4% of teachers—or eleven teachers—were unaware of the existence of the Mathematics Education program. According to the teachers, the information they received regarding the existence of the Mathematics Education program was very limited. The absence of student teachers from the Mathematics Education program at their schools was one of the reasons why the teachers were unaware of the existence of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup. Two teachers also mentioned that information about events organized by the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup never reached their schools. The schools in question are located in the PUT and Sindang areas. In fact, both teachers stated that IAIN Curup had never conducted any outreach activities directed at their schools. The teachers noted that IAIN Curup's outreach efforts lagged behind those of the university in Linggau, which had successfully reached their schools.

Evaluation of Program Quality

The quality of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup, which teachers consider to be quite good, is also supported by the program's "Good" accreditation—the minimum level in its accreditation scale. According to the teachers, even though it holds the minimum accreditation level of "Good," the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup demonstrates the high quality of its students through its alumni, who are employed at the schools where the teachers work. These alumni demonstrate a level of competence that is on par with graduates of similar programs at other universities located in Bengkulu Province. The relatively high quality of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup led 65.96% of teachers to believe that the program is worthy of recommendation as one of the top choices for students.

34.04% of teachers who were unaware of the quality of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup stated that they did not have complete information about the program. Information regarding the program—including its vision and mission, strengths, achievements, and events—was rarely available to these teachers. Teachers believe that the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup should establish its presence in the real world through achievements and in the virtual world through educational contexts. Teachers in the PUT and Sindang areas stated that they were completely unaware of the existence of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN

Curup. Teachers only know that there is a state institute in Curup, but they do not know the details about the institute or the programs it offers. The teachers deeply regret the lack of information available, because—especially in areas still classified as remote—teachers are desperately needed, particularly mathematics teachers.

This positive evaluation from teachers who had direct contact with the program's students aligns with prior research suggesting that experiential exposure influences perception (Akbar, 2015). Teachers who have witnessed the program's output firsthand are more likely to form favorable opinions.

Recommendations for Program Improvement

There have been many suggestions from teachers to enhance the profile of the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup. First, the Mathematics Education program could assign more students to teaching practicums at various schools. Second, the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup could conduct regular and frequent outreach through social media or in person. Third, the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup can improve the quality of its program by establishing a dedicated program laboratory, which will serve as a key attraction for prospective students. Fourth, the Mathematics Education Department at IAIN Curup can organize more national events to raise its profile. Fifth, the Mathematics Education Department at IAIN Curup can organize training programs in collaboration with the Mathematics Teachers' Working Group (MGMP), the Department of Education, or other educational institutions. Sixth, the Mathematics Education Department at IAIN Curup is expected to improve the accreditation status of its study program.

B. Students' Perceptions of The Mathematics Education Program at IAIN Curup

The student questionnaire revealed a stark contrast to teachers' perceptions. As shown in Figure 1, despite 90.30% of students being aware of IAIN Curup as an institution, 81.72% were unaware of the specific existence of the Mathematics Education Program.

Table 1 Students' Awareness of IAIN and It's Programs

Aspect	Yes	No
Know of IAIN Curup	90.30 %	9,7%
Know Mathematics Education Program	18,28 %	81,72%

According to Table 1 This significant gap ($\chi^2 = 12.56$, df = 1, $p < 0.001$) indicates a serious failure in communicating the Mathematics program's existence to potential students. The chi-square test also revealed significant associations between knowledge of the program and school type ($\chi^2 = 9.87$, df = 2, $p = 0.007$), with students from science majors being more likely to be aware of the program than those from social studies or vocational tracks.

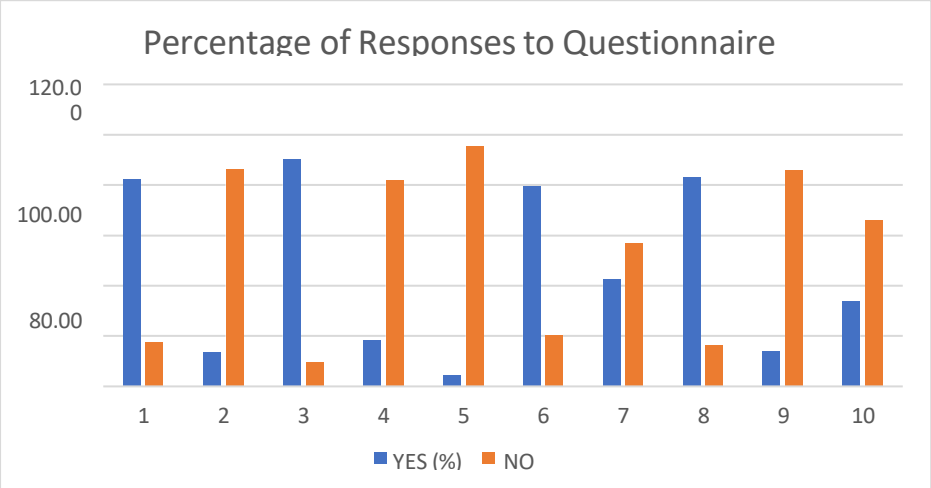
Based on interview, student interest in enrolling in or joining the Mathematics Education program is also low. A total of 95.52% of students declined to join the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup. This is due to students' lack of awareness about the program and the limited information they have received

regarding the Mathematics Education program. Students stated that they did not receive sufficient information about the Mathematics Education program. Some of the students interested in majoring in mathematics stated that they did not want to join the Mathematics Education program at IAIN Curup because the campus is located in a regency rather than in a city. Another students saya the only know IAIN Curup as an Islamic Campus, there's no mathematics department there.

Some students also said that it is important to attend high-quality universities such as UGM, UNSRI, and UI. 10% of students are also aware of how important accreditation quality is when choosing a major to support their future job search, such as for civil service positions. Students are also more interested in enrolling in civil service academies such as IPDN, BPN, and others.

This is supported by the lack of student interest in majoring in mathematics, as illustrated in Graph 1, item no. 2. The survey results presented in Graph 1, item no. 2, indicate that student interest in pursuing a degree in mathematics is not high. 86.38% of students declined to major in mathematics, even though Graph 3, items 6, 7, 8, and 9, show that students have good interest and motivation, with an average of 58.44% of students expressing interest and motivation toward learning mathematics.

Graph 1. Students' Perspectives on Lectures



These two contradictory findings are supported by several factors, namely students' low confidence in their ability to solve math problems, as illustrated in Graph 2 for items 10, 13, and 14. An average of 59.51% across these three items indicates that when faced with math problems, students struggle to answer them and to connect the mathematical concepts needed to solve them. This occurs because students' ability to understand the problems is still low. According to the interview results, students stated that when faced with problems in the form of long stories or texts, they find it difficult to analyze the problems that need to be solved.

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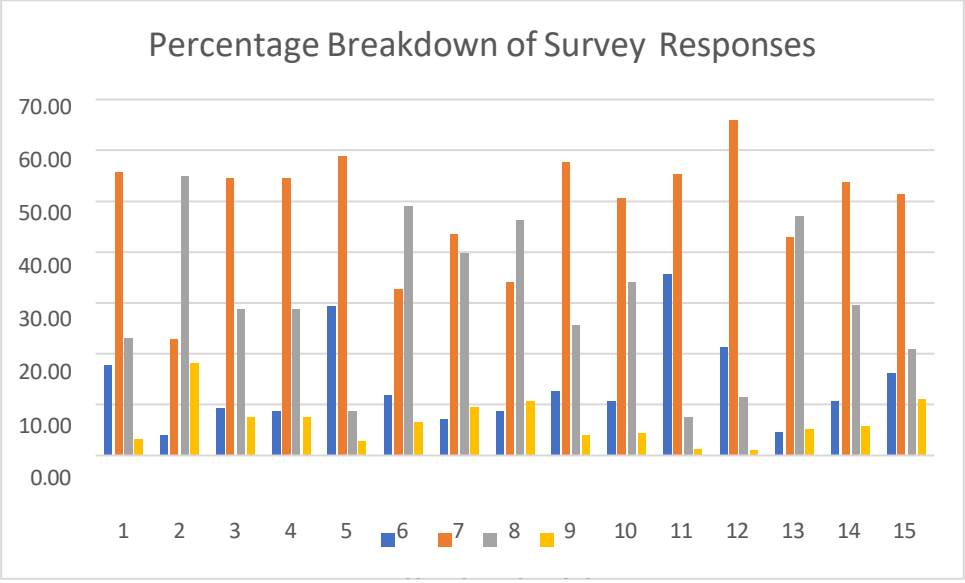

Graph 2. Students' Perspectives on Mathematics Learning

In addition to difficulties in solving math problems, students are more interested in pursuing college majors such as medicine, chemistry, biology, international relations, history, literature, art, law, and others. Fifteen percent of the students interviewed stated that they would pursue police or military training in line with their aspirations. 80% of the social studies students interviewed—a total of 40 students—stated that they would major in economics, business, accounting, and other fields unrelated to mathematics. 75% of the vocational students interviewed—in mechanical engineering, civil engineering, and electrical engineering—stated that they would continue their studies in engineering fields, such as IT, architecture, and so on.

The Diconnect Between Interest and Reality

The study also revealed a concerning disconnect: while students may have interest in fields requiring strong mathematical foundations, they do not recognize the importance of mathematics for these careers. As a student interested in economics stated:

"Saya mau kuliah ekonomi, tidak perlu matematika tinggi. Cukup bisa hitung-hitungan dasar saja."

(I want to study economics; I don't need advanced mathematics. Basic arithmetic is enough.)

This misconception aligns with findings by Sadewo et al. (2022) that many students fail to understand how mathematics permeates all aspects of life and academic disciplines. The elimination of the Statistics course from one faculty's curriculum—mentioned in the introduction—may have reinforced this erroneous belief that mathematics is unnecessary outside of mathematics-specific fields.

C. Integrating Teacher's and Students' Perspectives

The concurrent triangulation of data reveals a significant perception gap between teachers and students regarding the Mathematics Education Program at IAIN Curup. While teachers

view the program relatively positively and consider it worthy of recommendation, students are largely unaware of the program's existence and express limited interest in enrolling. This gap can be understood through several theoretical lenses:

1. **Information Asymmetry**

   Teachers, as educational professionals, have greater access to and understanding of educational programs, including their quality and outcomes. However, this information does not effectively transmit to students, perhaps because teachers may not actively promote the program or because students do not seek or trust such information.

2. **The Student-Teacher Disconnect**

   The finding that teachers consider the program worthy of recommendation while students lack awareness suggests a communication gap in the educational ecosystem. As one teacher explained:

   "Sebenarnya saya sudah tahu program ini dan menilainya cukup baik, tapi saya tidak pernah secara khusus merekomendasikannya kepada siswa karena saya pikir mereka sudah tahu."
   (Actually, I already knew about this program and consider it fairly good, but I never specifically recommended it to students because I assumed they already knew.)

   This assumption, repeated across multiple interviews, highlights the need for more intentional and structured information dissemination from teachers to students.

3. **Geographic and Socioeconomic Factors**

   The significant association between school location and awareness of the program suggests that geographic factors play a crucial role. Schools in remote areas (PUT, Sindang) reported receiving no outreach from IAIN Curup, while schools in Curup city had some awareness. This inequity potentially exacerbates educational disparities, as students from remote areas may have fewer options and less information about local higher education opportunities.

4. **The Reputation-Effect Cycle**

   The declining enrollment may create a negative reputation effect, where low enrollment reinforces perceptions that the program is undesirable, further reducing enrollment. As one student noted:

   "Jika jurusan itu sepi peminat, mungkin kualitasnya tidak bagus."
   (If that department has few applicants, its quality is probably not good.)
   This perception, while unfounded, can become self-fulfilling if not addressed through improved visibility and reputation management.

   This study makes several contributions to theory. First, it extends *Stakeholder Theory* (Freeman, 1984) by demonstrating how perceptions of educational programs are not merely a function of direct experience but are mediated by information access and communication networks. Teachers, as professional stakeholders with greater institutional knowledge, formed positive perceptions based on direct contact with

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program outputs (practicum students), while students, as consumers with limited information, formed negative perceptions primarily based on indirect cues such as campus location and accreditation status. This finding challenges the assumption in stakeholder theory that stakeholders with greater proximity to an organization necessarily have more positive perceptions; rather, proximity must be accompanied by effective communication.

Second, the findings support *Information Asymmetry Theory* (Akerlof, 1970) in an educational context. The significant perception gap between teachers and students reflects classic information asymmetry: teachers possess "superior" information about program quality, but this information fails to transmit to students due to communication breakdowns. This explains why teachers considered the program "worthy of recommendation" while simultaneously failing to actively recommend it—an assumption that students already possessed this information. This extends Akerlof's theory by identifying a specific mechanism—*assumed knowledge transfer*—that perpetuates information asymmetry even when the informed party has positive perceptions.

Third, the study contributes to *Expectation-Confirmation Theory* (Oliver, 1980) literature by identifying how "unexamined expectations" shape student decision-making. Students who were unaware of the program did not engage in expectation-confirmation processes; rather, they made decisions based on default preferences (urban campuses, prestigious universities) shaped by broader social discourses rather than program-specific information. This suggests that for potential students with limited awareness, decisions are driven by *default expectations*—broad, socially-constructed preferences—rather than *experience-based expectations*. This extends Oliver's model by distinguishing between two types of expectation formation: *conscious* (based on direct information) and *default* (based on social norms).

Fourth, this study contributes to the literature on *higher education marketing* (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015) by demonstrating the critical role of intermediaries—specifically teachers—in shaping student perceptions of local educational programs. The finding that teachers' positive perceptions did not automatically translate to student awareness suggests that promotional strategies must explicitly target teachers as *information brokers* rather than assuming positive teacher perceptions will naturally influence student choices.

D. Implications for Mathematics Program Development

The findings have several implications for the Mathematics Education Program at IAIN Curup:

1. **The Need for Integrated Promotion**
   Promotional strategies must not only target students directly but also engage teachers as influential intermediaries. The finding that teachers' direct experience with practicum students positively influences their perception suggests that expanding practicum placements could serve dual purposes: training students and promoting the program.

2. **Overcoming Geographic Barriers**
   The geographic disparities in program awareness call for targeted outreach to remote schools. This might include:
   - Establishing partnerships with schools in underserved areas
   - Conducting regular school visits (at least once per semester)
   - Developing digital outreach that can reach remote areas effectively
3. **Addressing Students' Misconceptions**
   The finding that many students underestimate the importance of mathematics in their chosen fields suggests a need for educational interventions that demonstrate the relevance of mathematics across disciplines. This could include:
   - Career guidance sessions highlighting mathematical applications in various fields
   - Guest lectures from professionals in economics, engineering, and other fields
   - Integration of real-world problem-solving in mathematics instruction
4. **Strengthening Program Visibility**
   Teachers' recommendation to organize more national events aligns with research on institutional branding in higher education. The Mathematics Education Program could consider:
   - Hosting an annual mathematics competition for high school students
   - Organizing teacher training workshops in collaboration with MGMP
   - Developing a strong social media presence showcasing student achievements
5. **Enhancing Academic Quality**
   While teachers rated the program's quality positively, the desire for improved accreditation status suggests that pursuing a higher accreditation level (e.g., "Very Good" or "Excellent") could enhance the program's appeal, particularly for students concerned about future employment prospects.

E. Study Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design captures perceptions at a single point in time, limiting causal inferences. Future research employing longitudinal designs could track how perceptions evolve as promotional strategies are implemented.

Second, the research was geographically limited to Rejang Lebong Regency. While this provides depth, it limits generalizability. Comparative studies across multiple regencies in Indonesia would strengthen the evidence base. Third, this study focused on two stakeholder groups (teachers and students). Parents and school principals are also influential in students' college decisions and should be included in future research (Gorard & Smith, 2006).

Fourth, the study relied primarily on self-report measures, which are subject to social desirability bias. Future research could incorporate behavioral measures (e.g., actual enrollment decisions) to complement perceptual data.

Fifth, while the study identified perception gaps, it did not examine the effectiveness of specific promotional strategies. Experimental research testing different promotional approaches would provide more actionable recommendations.

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Conclusion

This study examined the perceptions of teachers and students in Rejang Lebong regarding the existence of the Mathematics Education Study Program at IAIN Curup. The findings reveal two contrasting perspectives that provide important implications for program development.

Summary of Findings:

1. **Teachers' Perspective:** Teachers generally perceive the Mathematics Education Program at IAIN Curup positively. More than 65% of teachers consider the program worthy of recommendation to their students, citing the program's proximity to schools as its primary advantage. Teachers who had direct experience with practicum students from the program offered particularly favorable evaluations.
2. **Students' Perspective:** In contrast, students perceive the program poorly. Over 80% of students are unaware of the program's existence, and more than 95% express no interest in enrolling. This negative perception stems from limited information, lack of confidence in mathematical ability, preference for urban campuses, concern for accreditation status, and career aspirations outside mathematics education.
3. **Perception Gap:** The study identifies a significant gap between teachers' positive perceptions and students' lack of awareness and interest, suggesting a breakdown in information transmission within the educational ecosystem.

Theoretical Contributions:

This study contributes to the literature on higher education marketing and stakeholder perception by demonstrating how information asymmetry and geographic disparities shape perceptions of local educational programs. The findings highlight the importance of integrating multiple stakeholder perspectives in program evaluation and development.

Practical Implications:

For the Mathematics Education Program at IAIN Curup, the findings underscore the need for:

1. A comprehensive promotional strategy targeting both students and teachers
2. Expanded outreach to remote schools to address geographic disparities
3. Programs demonstrating mathematics' relevance across disciplines
4. Enhanced program visibility through events and collaborations
5. Pursuit of higher accreditation status

Recommendations for Future Research:

Future studies should:

1. Investigate the effectiveness of specific promotional strategies
2. Examine perceptions of other stakeholders (parents, principals)
3. Explore factors influencing students' career choices in mathematics education
4. Conduct longitudinal studies tracking changes in perception and enrollment

Declarations

Author contribution.
Irni Latifa Irsal: Conceptualization, research design, methodology development, instrument validation, data collection coordination, qualitative data analysis (thematic analysis), and manuscript writing – original draft preparation.
Anisya Septiana: Data collection (teacher and student questionnaires), quantitative data analysis (descriptive statistics and Chi-square tests), visualization (tables and graphs), and manuscript writing – review and editing.
Tasha Marshanda: Literature review, data collection assistance, interview transcription, member checking, and manuscript writing – review and editing.
Ivo Novinda: Data collection assistance, administrative support, reference management, and manuscript preparation for submission.
All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.he contribution or credit of the author must be stated in this section.

Funding statement. This research funding by IAIN Curup.
Conflict of interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.
Additional information. No additional information is available for this paper.

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